VISIT…

The Ethics of Aesthetics in Japanese Cinema and Literature

Polygraphic desire

Nina Cornyetz

Routledge Contemporary Japan Series

The Ethics of Aesthetics in Japanese Cinema and Literature

The Ethics of Aesthetics in Japanese Cinema and Literature is a study of the ethics of modern Japanese aesthetics from the 1930s, through the Second World War and into the postwar period. What makes this book unique is that Nina Cornyetz opens up the field in new and controversial ways by exploring the tensions and harmonies between psychoanalytic ethics of the drive and sociopolitical ethics of relation to the other. Rejecting the convention of viewing these as contradictory, Cornyetz insists that the exemplars of psychoanalytic ethics are to the contrary, simultaneously politically ethical.

Cornyetz embarks on innovative and unprecedented readings of some of the most significant literary and film texts of the Japanese canon, including works by Kawabata Yasunari, Mishima Yukio, Abe Kōbō, and Shinoda Masahiro, all renowned for their texts' aesthetic and philosophic brilliance. The study looks at how relations between individuals and communities in these texts either reiterate or transcend stereotypes, and how desire is or is not limited by sociocultural norms. Cornyetz argues that these authors' and filmmakers' concepts of beauty and relation to others were, in fact, deeply impacted by political and social factors.

Ranging from a discussion of fascist aesthetics to heterosexism in modern Japan, *The Ethics of Aesthetics in Japanese Cinema and Literature* shows how certain changing political, intellectual, and artistic issues, as well as sociocultural norms, variously nuanced these texts' depictions of desire and the "other." Through her analysis of cultural texts such as the films *Woman in the Dunes* and *Double Suicide*, Cornyetz challenges the convention that praises the universality of their artistic, existential or intellectual achievements. Rather she seeks to reorient these within a specifically Japanese historical context to give a new and insightful interpretation to the work. This groundbreaking study is truly interdisciplinary and will appeal to students and scholars of Japanese literature, film, gender, culture, history, and even psychoanalytic theory.

Nina Cornyetz is Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at New York University, USA.

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For my parents Paul and Bernice Cornyetz

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Of course this study, like most intellectual projects, has deep roots. The varied support, critiques, and intellectual input of friends and colleagues have been simply indispensable to the writing of this book. The final chapter, actually, is a revised version of an essay written well in advance of the study itself, inspired by the topic of a Rutgers University Center for Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture Seminar – "The Aesthetic" – when I was a fellow there during 1997–8. I thank all the members of the seminar, but most of all Joan Copjec, Louisa Schein, and Xudong Zhang, for their incisive commentary, meaningful participation throughout the year, and for their friendship. During the same period I taught a closely related graduate seminar for the Comparative Literature Department at Rutgers, "The Aesthetic in Modern Japanese Film and Narrative," where I began broadening my thinking beyond the one film. I was very fortunate to have the regular input of an astoundingly sophisticated group of students. I am particularly thankful for their enthusiasm and insights. Subsequent versions of my work-in-progress on *Double Suicide*, presented at an annual Association for Asian Studies meeting in March 1998, and at the University of Oregon in early 1999, benefited from wonderful comments by, respectively, Livia Monnet and Stephen Brown. Slowly my thoughts had begun their metamorphosis into this study.

In order to write the book, however, I needed time. The gracious grant of a semester leave in spring 1999 by Rutgers University Deans Richard Foley and Barry Qualls gave me the first chunk of that time. A sudden, unexpected but very welcome invitation from Matsuura Hisaki and Hasumi Shigehiko to teach a graduate seminar at Tokyo University for the Department of Theories of Representations and Culture paved my way to a three-month-plus stint in Tokyo from April to July 1999. There I was able to access sources on film that are hard to come by in the States. The seminar I taught, "*Nihon eiga/bungaku ni okeru jendā to bigaku*" (Aesthetics and gender in Japanese cinema and literature), helped me explore many of the themes that have come together in this book, refined by the (once again) regular intellectual contributions of a group of very engaged, insightful, and surprisingly vocal (for Japanese, or so I am told) graduate students. The

thoughtful comments from Matsuura Hisaki throughout those months are deeply appreciated, as are the excellent criticisms made by Asada Akira on the earliest incarnations of the chapters on Kawabata. Also during my stay in Japan, Anne McKnight was always sharp and provocative in our discussions of a wide range of topics – not limited to this study proper – that kept me on my intellectual toes. So was Azuma Hiroki. Nagahara Yutaka embodied for me that rare combination of true friendship and intellectual companionship, during my stay in Japan and beyond. Toyosaki Satoko and I laughed away innumerable stresses night after night in various cafés, bars and other haunts. Satoko also helped me enormously as I raced to turn English lectures into good Japanese with never enough time for the task. Shimada Masahiko was, as always, a wise, gracious and generous friend. And extra-special thanks are due my dear friend and intellectual comrade Keith Vincent, who not only read more of this book in manuscript form than anyone else, and whose comments helped me clarify the tension at the heart of this study, but in addition, whose close presence two flights down at New York University since his return from Japan has been an absolute Godsend.

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Introduction

> No Japanese can die for freedom, but it is very Japanese to die for beauty and aesthetic purity.
>
> Shinoda Masahiro[1]

> Polygraph (pol/ē graf/, -gräf/), *n.*1. an apparatus for producing copies of a drawing or writing. 2. a prolific or versatile author. 3. an instrument for receiving and recording simultaneously tracings of variations in certain body activities. 4. a lie detector. [<Gk pol′ý graph(os) writing much. See POLY- , -GRAPH][2]

The Ethics of Aesthetics, first and foremost, interrogates the potential tensions and rapport between a political and a psychoanalytic ethics. On the one hand, as a materialist feminist, I am deeply concerned with literary and cinematic subtexts of domination and exploitation. Accordingly, one trajectory of this study is concerned with "ethics" in the spirit of Emmanuel Lévinas as he has been adapted by contemporary cultural theorists such as Iain Chambers, Rey Chow, and Naoki Sakai, or the interpretation and evaluation of representations of relation to the other in film and literature (or, a politics of representation of self and other).[3] Following such cultural theorists, this study explores whether these representations permit radical alterity, or conversely, at the other extreme, whether they constitute an annihilation of the other, be it literally (in the form, for example, of aestheticized death) or through sublation into the self. (And of course there are myriad possibilities in between the two extremes.) Under the rubric of "relation to other," I include relations that differentiate between individuals (such as that between a man and a woman) and those between imagined national-cultural communities (of us and them, such as Japan/the East and the West). In order to accomplish such an evaluation of ethics, the study is deeply attentive to the ideological impact of historical circumstances contemporaneous with the literary and cinematic texts under consideration, such as Japanese fascism in the prewar, debates on subjectivity after the

war, and the virtual collapse of the communist movement in the 1960s. That is, the study seeks to also elucidate what I deem the relevant problematics of coterminous intellectual, philosophic, and political issues in Japan.

On the other hand, literature and film are *imaginaries* with complex, polyvalent, and often contradictory relations to their contemporaneous contexts; hence they invite psychoanalytic inquiry. Moreover, for psychoanalytic theorists, ethics *must* be considered in relation to desire, and in relation to beauty.[4] As a matter of fact, according to psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the ethical act consists of an act "true" to one's desire. But it is more complex than simply "following one's heart" – the act may well be true only to one's unconscious desire, and therefore be "untrue" to one's conscious apprehension of what one wants.[5] Such an ethics concerns one's relation to desire, to the objects of the drive, and to *jouissance*, rather than to the other.[6] Moreover, desire is not always *literal* in its articulation, as Joan Copjec reminds us.[7] Further, desire, according to Lacan, is always the desire of the Other, which means, in part, that what we want is bound up with what we imagine the Other wants of us.[8] (Throughout this study I will reserve the use of capital O Other to designate the radical, unrepresentable realm of an absolute alterity in philosophic and psychoanalytic thought, and not to reference an embodied other. Small o other shall designate a category of people homogenized by their heterogeneity to what is imagined to be a plural subjectivity of "us" or "we," as a repository of imagination and fantasy. I will use small o others to refer, simply, to other people. The place of the Other, however, may be at times *occupied* for the subject by others, or by imagined national communities such as East and West.) Because human beings seek their own desire in the desire of the Other, this formulation of desire tends to collude with the network of social discourse in which one is born and lives, rather than taking the form of an act that transcends the Symbolic and Imaginary orders of human existence. Conversely, the truly ethical act, for Lacan, would be one that reaches for the Real, and in so doing, transcends our socially dictated expression and experience of our desire.[9]

> Is it possible to conceive of an ethics that is not subject to the logic of the superego in all its resonances: free, on the one hand, from the often-stressed "irrationality" of its demands and, on the other, from its socializing function as the "internal" representative of "external" authorities, values and norms? We can reply affirmatively, simply by pointing out that this is exactly what Lacan is after with his conception of ethics.[10]

But of course the ethics of seeking *jouissance*, although linked in Lacan's formulation to a transgression of social norm, or a transcendence of the Symbolic (and Imaginary), does not necessarily complement a politically correct agenda seeking to discern subtexts that ideologically reinforce and reproduce racism, sexism, fascism, and so forth.[11] It is easy to imagine how a text might be psychoanalytically ethical and politically unethical, or vice

versa. One ethics claims that "on a certain level every subject, average as he may be, wants his own destruction, *whether he wants it or not*."[12] The other privileges a humanism that idealizes human well-being. As Mas'ud Zavaradeh sees it, "the emphasis on resistance by means of *jouissance* is a strategy distracting attention away from domination."[13] Zavaradeh elaborates, "ludic postmodernist theory" insists that "*jouissance* is a subversive device: it renders the old verities ridiculous, empty, and pathetically backward. However, and this is the genuinely reactionary politics of *jouissance*, such superstructuralism, by proposing the culture as autonomous, allows the economic to remain intact."[14] Instead, he proposes a reading that reveals the subtexts of class struggle (or gendered, racial, and ethnic inequities and stereotypes). Hosea Hirata, whose *Discourses of Seduction* has just been published (too late for me to engage with in this study), seems to have taken the exact opposite path, and problematized the political fetishization of "history" itself in his fascinating Lacanian reading of Mishima, Kawabata, and others. My study has conversely insisted upon bringing the two ethics into dialogue, even if they might contradict one another at times – and therefore render my argument likewise contradictory. But I want to go further, to also insist that the apparent – or seemingly – irresolvable conflict between the two ethics is not inevitable. Rather, there are texts, or moments in texts, where the two may coexist – as Lacan suggests in his characterization of Antigone as the exemplar of a psychoanalytic ethics. And this is precisely the same sort of successful pairing of political and psychoanalytic ethics that I describe in the final chapter on the Shinoda film *Double Suicide*. As a matter of fact, Slavoj Žižek has consistently argued that a psychoanalytic ethics is not oppositional to a political one, but rather, it is precisely the opposite.[15]

However, for me, the co-presence of the two concepts of ethics evidences a series of "developmental" stages in the writing of the book, which became in the end, a constant tension often pulling the study in two directions at once. I first "finished" this book in 2001, or so I thought. Actually, it had begun as a much more formal, and narrower, study on modern Japanese aesthetics in cinema and literature. (My use of the term aesthetics is meant to signify aesthetics in its broadest sense, or the subject's apprehension and ordering of the sensate world, and not only the beautiful.)[16] Hence, I began with a set of texts that were both beautiful and sensate: Shinoda Masahiro's *Double Suicide*, the first Japanese literary Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country*, Abe Kōbō and Teshigahara Hiroshi's film, *Woman in the Dunes*.

From the very beginning, I employed the concept of disinterestedness to designate, inspired by Kant, a subjective (aesthetic) judgment by the perceiving subject that is bracketed off from, or independent of, other concerns such as ethics or use-value. My objective, however, was quite different from the Kantian one. I did not focus on the mechanics of judgment, nor gesture toward universalism or transcendentalism. To the contrary, unlike Kant, I was determined to re-link aesthetic disinterest to sociopolitical and gendered

ways of apprehending in order to describe a historically specific aesthetical constellation. This aesthetic disinterest should not, however, be confused with the sort of alienation of the spectator that, for Bertolt Brecht, interfered with identification and hence allowed for a politicization of art.[17] Rather, it signifies aesthetics-for-itself. When this disinterest transcends the boundaries of artistic production, and is applied to life (or war), it signals the (potentially fascist) conflation of life and art. This sort of disinterest toward the other and the (material) real could also be called a "transcendental" posture – or inflexible and non-reversible bracketing out of the sociohistorical context of art for art's sake. This aesthetic of distance, that is endemic to Kawabata's narratives, lent itself well to the 1930s and early 1940s political climate of imperialism and internal, deepening repression and censorship. It is not only that readers could sink into sensual reveries evoking an imaginary past, forgetting about the march of aggression in China and elsewhere. As I hope to successfully argue, it is the manner in which the subject beholds the other in this disinterest.

One could also call mine a determination to *unbracket* these textual and cinematic aesthetics (which Walter Benjamin called "politicizing art"), by placing these texts back into their political-historical-ideological contexts. It was this contextualization that led me to broaden the section on Kawabata beyond *Snow Country*, and eventually add Mishima Yukio's "performative bundle," consisting of various texts and activities including narratives and essays, but also his photo shoots and even his public persona. My impetus for revisiting such familiar terrain as Kawabata, Abe, and Mishima, and the reason for choosing these three in particular, also arose in part from my judgment that precisely such a *politically* nuanced contextualization was missing in the existing extensive corpus of secondary literature on their literary and filmic texts, in both English and Japanese.

All of the writers/filmmakers discussed in *The Ethics of Aesthetics* lived through the rise of Japanese fascism, the suppression of communism, the Second World War, and finally, defeat and the American occupation. It seems obvious that these succeeding political and historical events impacted cultural ideals of beauty and concepts of self and other. But surprisingly, secondary sources on Kawabata, Abe, and even Mishima – in both English and Japanese – overwhelmingly ignore or deny the significance of *political* ideology in their pursuit of either purified analyses, or psychoanalyses of the authors. (Charles Cabell's dissertation on Kawabata, David Pollack's *Reading Against Culture*, and the oppositional politicizations of Mishima's homofascism by Ōe Kenzaburō and J. Keith Vincent are notable exceptions.)[18] In a nutshell, Kawabata was an aesthete unconcerned with politics for whom the war constituted a personal, artistic, and cultural trauma.[19] Abe gave up communism (and politics in general) to write, and then film *Woman in the Dunes*, a universalist, existential allegory that has nothing to do with the *specifically Japanese* postwar or capitalism.[20] Mishima's embrace of neofascism, calls to resurrect the emperor, and attempted *coup d'état* in 1970

(that culminated in his public suicide by ritual disembowelment) are all rendered a sham politics – nothing more than his personal, nihilist aesthetics.[21]

I was convinced that one reason for this, as I elaborate in the chapters on Kawabata as well as in Chapter 11, "Scripting the scopic," is the dearth of theories of *modern* Japanese aesthetics, the result of the problematic of an incessant binding of modern Japanese arts to premodern Japanese aesthetics. Hence Kawabata and Mishima are interpreted aesthetically in relation to such premodern things as, respectively, haiku or samurai culture. Mishima is often read psychologically in reference to his childhood and his sexuality.[22] But their modern philosophic and intellectual attributes are largely attributed only to the influence of Western surrealism and nihilism rather than to contemporaneous intellectual, ideological, or political events in Japan.[23] (Although certainly many studies situate them comparatively within a *literary* historical context.) The war functions for these critics as a psychic and cultural trauma, but the specificities of Japanese *political* ideology, including the affects of fascist ideology, are generally left out of the critical equation. Abe, especially, who cannot be linked to a premodern aesthetics, is virtually severed from *any* specific Japanese context in most secondary sources.

This also means that contemporaneous political events and ideology become virtually inconsequential to the conventional readings of literature and films deemed beautiful, or to the purification of aesthetics outside of politics. It is of course Walter Benjamin who is most famous for cautioning us about the *inflexible* purification of domains that lurks at the core of fascist ideology.[24] In her critique of Nazi filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, Susan Sontag has reminded us that fascism appeals to the masses most not by virtue of its brutality, but with its beautiful images and sentiments.[25] Increasingly, then, my study was becoming evaluative and ethical, in the "cultural studies" sense that I have described above, or concerned with a politics of representation of various others. By 2001 it had transformed itself into a study of what I was calling the ethics of those aesthetics.

For a variety of reasons, my readers, however, convinced me that the manuscript was not yet ready for publication. As I reorganized, rewrote, and rethought each of the sections of the manuscript in keeping with those readers' recommendations, I also began to feel constrained by the limitations of the ethical evaluations I had been doing. Yes, Kawabata's aesthetics could be compared with those of fascist aesthetics, but there was also something more – a reaching out towards a perverse *jouissance* that was simultaneously an anti-fascism. Likewise, Mishima's insistent perversions twisted his texts away from the homophobia that also informs fascism. And, I had been reading Lacan on his formulation of a psychoanalytic ethics, and secondary studies on those ethics, as well as Alain Badiou. The focus of a psychoanalytic ethics is not "relation to the other." Instead, because the *objet a* is the object-cause of desire, Lacanian ethics is about one's relation to the *objet a*, or the drive(s), or as Alenka Zupančič prefers, to the Real.[26]

Copjec explains: "The ethics of psychoanalysis follows from its fundamental critique of ontology, from the theory of the drive and sublimation by which it displaces philosophical inquiries into the ontology of the subject. This ethics concerns the subject's relation to these small pieces of being, not primarily its relation to other people or to the Other."[27]

Non-utilitarian in all senses, the ethics that Lacan postulated transcends the realms of self-interest and social mores. Rather, it aims at a sort of purification of desire, or to somehow be true to one's "pure" desire. On the surface, this might seem contradictory with Lacan's assertion that "desire is the desire of the Other," and his notion of the subject.[28] However, as Zupančič points out, the desire of the Other poses itself as a *question*, or an enigma, to which the subject responds, hence, there is a potential act by the subject that is true to the desire that inhabits a subject, without postulating a truth to desire or to the subject him/herself.[29]

At first glance, these two ethics seem simply incompatible. One is concerned with history, or the varied narratives we invent about the material real, the other with the Real.[30] Desire, however, also brings us right back to the Symbolic. Born of a split in the developing human subject, desire in adults takes amorphous forms of expression in language, or the Symbolic realm. These forms are simultaneously indebted to our singular psyches and yet have intimate relation to the specific discursive, cultural-ideological and historical contexts in which we live. I realized, retroactively, that in fact all of the texts in my study were struggling with a tension over the expression of desire – between seeking *jouissance* and socially prescribed mores dictating how one should seek and find pleasure. Hence, it makes sense to link the analysis of desire, alongside that of aesthetics, with a sociocultural and ideological context, because the subject of course structures his/her relation to the other, and to his or her own desire in *society*. More simply, to grasp how an ethical desire might transcend the Symbolic and Imaginary configurations of the world, it makes sense to describe those configurations. In this manner, and quite in contrast to the tendency to see a political ethics and a psychoanalytic one as inevitably at odds with one another, and as Badiou also insists (albeit differently than me), I believe they are not constitutively oppositional.[31] As a matter of fact, it is the inverse. As Žižek points out "If there is an ethico-political lesson to be learned from psychoanalysis, it consists of the insight that the great calamities of our century (from the Holocaust to the Stalinist *désastre*) resulted not from our succumbing to the morbid attraction of the Void but, on the contrary, from our endeavoring to avoid confronting it and to impose the direct rule of Truth and/or Goodness."[32] The fascist tendencies of Kawabata and Mishima, as well as the *unethical* village in *Woman in the Dunes*, ultimately emerge from, as I will show, precisely such an attempt to avoid confronting this Void (the Real) and suturing over lack with variously nationalistic, acculturated, and homosocial particularisms, or a naming, hence a fixing, of an ethnicized and nationalized subjectivity.

Previewing the book

Part I, "Woman as second nature and other fascist proclivities in Kawabata Yasunari," begins with an introduction to Kawabata's narrative quest to describe beauty. The first substantive chapter, "Myth-making," engages a sampling of prewar, wartime, and postwar essays and fictions by Kawabata to describe how literary and artistic conventions function in Kawabata's texts, showing from what constellations of ideology they emerge. Next, I leave Kawabata aside for Chapter 2, "Fascist aesthetics," to explain in some detail how I am using the terms fascism and fascist aesthetics. The following chapter, "Kawabata and fascist aesthetics," brings the first two chapters into a dialogue, arguing that Kawabata's mobilization of signifiers of tradition, such as references to Zen Buddhism and refusal of the rubric of modernism, create a mythic version of the Japanese past in which "difference" is sublated within a nationalized aesthetic. Ultimately, I show how these aesthetics can best be understood as a reactionary modernism, with a palingenetic politics of time, and an ontologization of loss, attributes postulated to be common denominators of all fascist ideology by Roger Griffin, Peter Osborne, Walter Benjamin, Mark Neocleous, and others.

"Virgins and other little objects" focuses on sexual and gendered politics, to debate how Kawabata's cold and disinterested narrative gaze alternately subsumes within a cultural homogeneity, annihilates, or dialogues with the alterity of women. Kawabata was (in)famous for his "virgin complex." This chapter brackets this fetish off from a sociological or cultural analysis of contemporaneous Japanese sexual mores, to analyze it as a narrative device that highlights the tensions between eroticism and interdiction, purity and defilement so integral to Kawabata's narratives. Discussing *Snow Country*, *Thousand Cranes*, and *Sleeping Beauties*, this chapter offers a close reading of the narrative gaze. It makes extensive use of Lacanian and Freudian psychoanalytic theory to interpret the complexities of this gaze, revealing how women in these texts tend to embody either a mythic, pure, aestheticized, and nationalized Japanese traditionalism, or conversely, a threatening, non-Japanese defilement, or abjection linked to death. At the same time, it acknowledges that the texts evidence a movement towards a "truth" to the protagonists' desire that indeed transcends socially circumscribed expressions of that desire.

Part II devotes itself to a discussion of Abe Kōbō and the Abe/Teshigahara film *Woman in the Dunes*. I have already noted that the film is overwhelmingly interpreted as an apolitical, universalist, and existentialist allegory. Although I believe that there are surely many "correct" albeit different readings, purely universalist readings must, of course, bracket the film out of its historical context. Precisely because the overwhelming critical movement has been to disengage the film from any relation particular to Japanese ideology and community, I want to the contrary to pose against this dominant way of interpreting the film an adamant unbracketing, or returning of

the film to its specific historical context. I read it as being about contemporaneous Japan. I also want to call attention to a critique of capitalism – symbolized by the sand – which existentialist interpretations appear, in general, to obscure.

This is (obviously) not to deny or ignore the important intersections of the film with so-called Western-originated intellectual discourses and those discourses' representative thinkers such as Marxism and Karl Marx, or existentialism and Jean-Paul Sartre. But I seek to ground my discussion of Marxism or existentialism in the film in the context of *Japanese* postwar intellectual debates on democracy, modernization, capitalism, and subjectivity. And if, as many have argued, postwar Japanese Marxists shifted the focus from class to individual, this must be taken into account in interpreting the form a Marxist critique might take in the film.[33]

As the title indicates, "A preface to *Woman in the Dunes*: space, geopolitics, and 'The idea of the desert'" functions in large part as a preface to my discussion of the film itself in the following chapters. I focus on an essay written by Abe in 1958, "Sabaku no shisō" ("The idea of the desert"), and what I regard as the elision of the essay's historical particularity in a 1997 commentary by Kuritsubo Yoshiki, "Abe Kōbō: 'Sabaku no shisō' – sono rinri to sekaisei ni tsuite" ("Abe Kōbō: on the ethics and worldliness in 'The idea of the desert'"). "The idea of the desert" clearly articulates some of Abe's thoughts about the metaphoric and political significance of the desert and critiques the use of the desert in various films. Not only do the comments made by Abe in the essay shed light on what he intended the desert to signify, his critique of other films use of the desert as a location suggests an attitude toward subjectivity (or being), colonial politics, and ethical relation to the other, which I find useful in analyzing *Woman in the Dunes*. Kuritsubo's commentary is as near to perfect an example as imaginable of how the overwhelming tendency to interpret Abe's texts (filmic or literary) as thoroughly universal relies on an elision of (*even clearly articulated*) political particularity. I do not position "The idea of the desert" as an authenticating or authorizing text by which I validate my interpretation of the film. Rather, the pairing of Abe's essay with Kuritsubo's temporarily stands in for the similar move that I argue attends the film and its reception. In addition, a set of critical concerns established in this chapter – on subjectivity, war responsibility, relation to the other, community, geopolitics, and so forth – continues to inform my analysis in the subsequent chapters.

In "Social networks and the subject," I map out what I deem relevant political-philosophic-literary discourses (they were deeply intertwined) as a means to understand how some Japanese intellectuals such as Abe were conceiving of being, aesthetics, politics, the other, and narrative arts at that time. There was then a raging debate on the politics of subjectivity in relation to the recent war and modernity in general. The socialist movement, which had enjoyed a resurgence in the immediate postwar, virtually disintegrated in the 1960s, but not before being enveloped by the subjectivity

debates.[34] In rethinking the Abe/Teshigahara film *Woman in the Dunes*, I remind the reader that Abe was a communist who grew up in the Japanese colony of Manchuria. I reread the film as a communist-inspired critique of Japanese capitalism and a particularized ethics (relation to the other) born of a retrogressive valorization of Japanese communalism and traditionalism (severed from the imperial system) in reaction to the American occupation in the early to mid-1960s. I show how the film depicts a traditional Japanese community that, although divested of the emperor, is nonetheless fascistic in its relation to the other. Moreover, I argue that an ontological investigation into the mediation of the other in the self (which brings Lacan back into the equation) is for Abe constitutively interlinked with the issue of the agency of the politicized subject in geographic and social networks. In this sense Abe/Teshigahara's film reaches for a dialogue between the ethics of the other, and the ethics of the Real. This chapter frequently engages Louis Althusser, Homi Bhabha, Marx, and Sakai to argue its theses.

Because my study focuses on the film rather than the book, I situate the film in a *cinematic* context, as well as a political-ideological one. The film is also famed for its eroticism. Accordingly, the final chapter of Part II, "Technologies of gazing," shifts the focus from the relation to the other in terms of communal identity, to an analysis of the gendered and individual, erotic relation between the protagonist Niki and the unnamed female antagonist, in the context of a contemporaneous erotic film boom. From the mid-1960s onward in Japan, not only pornography, "pink films" (soft-core pornographic movies) and *Nikkatsu roman poruno* (Nikkatsu romantic-pornography), but mainstream cinema as well made male domination of women the virtual idiom of Japanese cinematic eroticism. Released in 1964, *Woman in the Dunes* incorporates many of the developing technologies of erotic gazing: female nudity as spectacle, a bound and gagged woman, and a rape of a woman. However, through a careful formal analysis of the film syntax, I show how, unlike the contemporaneous erotic (*nikutai*) Japanese films, which often depended upon the abuse of women for spectator titillation, the manner in which these eroticized codes were manipulated in *Woman in the Dunes* actually de-eroticizes them. Hence, I argue that the developing codes of cinematic eroticism dependent on the domination of women were *cited in order to be subverted*, and thus constitute a filmic commentary on the gendered (or sexed) relation to the other. Finally, I ultimately argue that the film's eroticism relies on a decentralized ("feminine") sexual economy that also resolutely eroticizes the male body, offering an alternative erotic idiom.

In Part III my focus is on sexual and gender politics in Japan, against which I read Mishima's "sadomasochism" and eventual embrace of fascism and militarism. Mishima's homosexuality was unmentioned by most Japanese critics until relatively recently – although, as is generally the case, it was a sort of "open" secret. Posthumously "outed," his homosexuality is interpreted as intertwined with his nihilist aesthetics and his eventual embrace of neo-fascism and advocacy for the re-deification/re-empowerment of the

emperor.[35] I investigate: How was Mishima's sexuality – that he displayed theatrically in texts such as *Confessions of a Mask* or *Forbidden Colors* – generally disavowed while he was alive, and how did the circumstances of being in the closet impact Mishima's aesthetics? What led Mishima to embrace both a mythic notion of the emperor as the nodal point of Japanese identity and neo-fascism in the years leading up to his suicide?

"Textualizing flesh, or, (in)articulate desire" argues that Mishima theatricalized his gender and sexuality (as distinct from largely unconscious and normative gender performance) in his fiction, poetry, expository writings, roles as actor, political activities, photo shoots, and even his public suicide. Therefore, I view these together as a "performative bundle" that enacts the epistemology of the closet, as analyzed by Eve Sedgwick and others. I look at how, once positioned within the context of contemporaneous sexual politics, Mishima's ironic, romantic quest to re-deify the emperor (that he well knew was pure myth) bears relation to a radical rejection of the heteronormative mores of the real world. This chapter frequently compares Mishima to Jean Genet, finding similarity in their resolute theatrical performances of the social abjection that inheres in their homosexuality.

"Narcissism and sadism: Mishima as homofascist" follows the lead of Andrew Hewitt and J. Keith Vincent. I begin by addressing the problematic of the perception of a structural link between homosexuality and fascism (as in the Frankfurt School that views both as arising from failed Oedipal subject-formation resulting in a flawed relation to the other).[36] This, in turn, has been linked to the putative narcissism of fascism and homosexuality in their shared desire for the same and to the instability in representation that haunts both fascist atrocities (the unspeakable) and homosexuality (the love that dare not speak its name). While rejecting this structural link, this chapter analyzes the narcissism and sadomasochism of Mishima's texts. I argue that, in the end, Mishima shifted from a revolutionary (and possibly ethical in the Lacanian sense) expression of desire linked to the death drive to a perverse, fascistic rejection of homosexuality and an embrace of a community of de-eroticized, nationalized warriors.

The subject of Chapter 11, "Scripting the scopic: disinterest in *Double Suicide*," is Shinoda Masahiro's 1969 filmic adaptation of a puppet play by Chikamatsu Monzaemon, "Love Suicides at Amijima." Shinoda was affiliated with the Japanese Art Theater Guild, a group of young filmmakers attempting to create political-aesthetical films in opposition to the dominant studio productions of the 1960s, that they viewed as commercial, inartistic, and uninteresting.[37] Released in the year before Mishima's suicide, *Double Suicide* neatly bundles together many of the issues that are foremost throughout this study, to make an independent comment on the future possibility for Japanese art. I argue that the film constitutes a stunning employment of an Edo-period (1603–1868) source-text to problematize the binding of modern Japanese aesthetics to Japanese premodern convention – which has complicated most critiques of the modern subject in Japan – and to simultaneously

denounce the Edo economy (and its modern filmic legacy) of women as commodified objects of exchange between men. In order to do so the film relies on a specific filmic economy (and aesthetic) of distancing or disinterestedness that engenders a mode of the gaze quite different from the so-called male one. My discussion in Chapter 11 analyzes how the film's syntactical mobilization of disinterestedness results in a filmic gaze that decenters, rather than consolidates, the modern subject. Because the decentered subject is, however, deeply referential to the Japanese premodern non-centered (non) subject, and because a sort of transcendence of the subject had already taken place prior to the twentieth century in Japan, throughout I highlight the complexity of the significance of this disinterested gaze for a cogent critique of the (gendered) subject in modern Japan. By theatrically citing the exteriorized subjectivity and ideal of *iki* that informed Edo puppet theater, *Double Suicide* makes a gesture toward the Real in modern filmic time-space.

Finally, I find that the film successfully posits an ethics simultaneously political and psychoanalytic and that Koharu in particular can be likened to Antigone. Koharu does not capitulate to law – neither to the genre of double suicide (in which the lovers die side by side), nor to the law of class society that deems her attachment to Jihei illegal for economic reasons. She refuses to act in obedience to patriarchal law that insists that women and their relations are relegated to objects of exchange between men. Instead, honoring her commitment to Osan, her lover's wife, she acts willfully to reach beyond the demands of the superego. Moreover, unlike Jihei, who vacillates between transgression and capitulation to law, or is unable to free his desire from the desire of the other, it is the women (Koharu and Osan) who ultimately raise the ethical bar. Like Antigone, Koharu chooses death not because death is a sublime experience, but because she has no other choice if she is to be true to the desire that inhabits her.

Part I

Woman as second nature and other fascist proclivities in Kawabata Yasunari[1]

Kawabata Yasunari (1899–1972) was the first Japanese writer to win the Nobel prize for Literature, awarded him in 1968. He was renowned for his deep concern with "the beautiful," or aesthetics, as the title of his Nobel prize acceptance speech, "Utsukushii Nihon no watakushi" ("Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself") suggests. According to Ueda Makoto, Kawabata "repeatedly made the same point in his critical essays . . . he suggested that literature recorded nothing but . . . encounters with beauty."[2] Tachihara Masaaki put it this way: "Kawabata was always looking for beauty everywhere. When he discerned a beautiful object he relentlessly laid it bare in an attempt to get close to its true essence. His eyes were trained toward (*nozomi*) immortality and turned away from things of the earth."[3] Kawabata's lectures and essays frequently foreground the theme of beauty – for example, his *Bi no sonzai to hakken* (*The Existence and Discovery of Beauty*, 1969) devotes its first several pages to a description of the beauty of drinking glasses on a table in a Hawaiian hotel.[4] It is with this in mind that I open my analysis of desire in Kawabata.

My objective in these chapters on Kawabata is twofold: to undertake an historicized and gendered analysis of the "ethics" (meaning, as I have described it in the introduction, both relation to the other and relation to the truth of his own desire) of Kawabata's narrative aesthetics, and to take up the challenge of exploring how these compare structurally (and to a lesser degree thematically) with fascist aesthetics in general. I will focus on a set of tensions that, as these chapters argue, informs Kawabata's narrative gaze, relation to the other, and discursive expressions of desire. These tensions revolve around a resolutely aestheticized, acculturated reinvention of the real, or material reality, made complex by a contradictory desire for the (in the Lacanian sense) Real.[5] I will show how the desire for the Real is, so to speak, diverted by Kawabata's attempt to reorder all apprehension of the material real according to a highly mediated, aestheticized, culturally particular, second nature, a process that moreover places specific representations of women at its core. It is this diversion of the material real (reality) in

favor of a (gendered) cultural particularism that manifests itself variously throughout the texts by Kawabata that I will take up here, and that, in my opinion, resonates with fascist aesthetics. The reader should be aware, however, that when I say "Kawabata" (or later, Mishima, or Abe, etc.) it is shorthand for what might be more accurately described as the "author-function" and is not meant to reference the actual human being who once lived as "Kawabata Yasunari."[6]

I begin this analysis in "Myth-making" with the more prosaic task of describing how literary and artistic conventions function in Kawabata's modern texts. Next, in Chapter 2, "Fascist aesthetics," I explain in some detail how I comprehend and use the term "fascist aesthetics." "Kawabata and fascist aesthetics" brings the first two chapters together and compares the specific mobilization of signifiers of tradition by Kawabata with the structural conventions of fascist aesthetics. Here, in order to show from what constellations of ideology those conventions emerge and signify, the study also turns its attention to a broader analysis of related contemporaneous sociocultural, religious, and literary issues. Throughout these chapters, Japan, and sometimes the notion of a unified thing called the East, stand in the place of the self, while the place of the other is occupied by a (homogenized and monolithic) West. Chapter 4, "Virgins and other little objects," embarks on the more theoretical problematic of how the narrative gaze relates to the other as individual (for Kawabata, most commonly women) and what it might share and not share with fascist aesthetics in this ethics – or apprehension of the other. This chapter also attends to a psychoanalytic reading of the narrative gaze.

However, let me also state up front what I am not claiming that Kawabata, as an individual, was a card-carrying fascist who enthusiastically and uncritically supported the fascist-imperialist actions of Japan's military in the Second World War. But I do believe that it was his very (celebrated) aesthetics – or what I will be calling a nationalized, acculturating aestheticentrism – that made possible his (largely disavowed) enthusiasm for Japanese imperialism and colonialism, an enthusiasm revealed in some of his wartime writings, and convincingly argued by Charles Cabell.[7] I would go so far as to argue that, even were there no texts by Kawabata that literally voiced support for Japan's "mission" in Asia, a theoretical analysis of the *signifying system* that underpins Kawabata's aesthetics will reveal aspects shared by the various and different political forms of fascism. As a matter of fact, Kawabata's literature *is* beautiful, but that is not the end of the discussion, rather, it is where my study begins. The point that I will make here is that many attributes of his aesthetic indeed colluded with Japanese fascist ideology in general, and that those attributes came to dominate his aesthetics at the same time as Japan was becoming *politically* fascist. Accordingly, I do not attempt a systematic study of Kawabata's entire extensive corpus – but have focused on a few texts that best represent those attributes of his aesthetics. In fact, there exist texts within Kawabata's

collected works that work in oppositional ways to negate both the signifying system and the thematic nationalization/particularized acculturation of aesthetics that I position as the foundation for characterizing his aesthetics as "fascist." At least one of those, moreover, was written in 1930.[8] This suggests to me that, indeed, Kawabata struggled against a superegoic and nationalized fixing of desire. Nonetheless, in the texts I focus on here, as I hope to successfully argue, the struggle collapses into acquiescence to a proscribed, rather than independent, truth to his characters' *jouissance*. One final note of clarification: my analysis is not a comparison between Japan and other fascist states *per se*, but a theoretical, primarily structural exploration of a signifying system that underpins Kawabata's aesthetics and that is shared by the various and different political forms of fascism.

1 Myth-making

Kawabata's expository writings on literature and many of his narratives – both the earliest and some of his last – were decidedly modernist, influenced by Western stream-of-consciousness writers such as James Joyce and Marcel Proust.[1] It is curious, then, that he insisted that it was the Japanese classics alone that inspired him. Kawabata fiercely distinguished his ideal associative narrative from the Western avant-garde because they, Kawabata felt, reveled in psychological depravity and neglected the real, so-called natural world.[2] However, by "natural" Kawabata meant something quite specific: Japanese classical poetics, insisted Kawabata, were rooted in mediated impressions of the material – rather than purely psychic – world and were thus superior to Western modernism (which reveled in mental unbalance). From the 1920s forward, Kawabata sought a "new mode of Japanese literature" inspired by Japanese literary conventions. In 1934 he insisted:

> I believe that the classics of the East, especially the Buddhist scriptures, are the supreme works of literature of the world. I revere the sutras not for their religious teachings but as literary visions. I have had in mind for the last fifteen years the plan for a work to be entitled "The Song of the East," which I would like to make my own swan song. In it I will sing, in my fashion, a vision of the classics of the East. I may die before I can write it, but I should like it at least to be understood that I wanted to write it. I have received the baptism of modern literature and I have myself imitated it, but basically I am an oriental, and for fifteen years I have never lost sight of my bearings.[3]

Such a rejection of things Western and valorization of things Japanese in the arts and literature was by no means uncommon for Kawabata's generation. Many of his contemporaries felt Japan had become excessively Westernized. As did others, Kawabata sought to find in Japanese tradition (before Japan had been tainted by Western materialism and rationalism) a spiritual superiority to offset perceptions of Japanese technological inferiority.[4]

For Kawabata this Japanese inspiration began with formal concerns (although it did not end there). Throughout his corpus are woven citations of, references to, and other reminders of Japanese literary and art forms from the Heian period (794–1185) through Edo, that in the modern era have been canonized as signifiers of Japanese convention. For example, the separate poetic episodes and images that together comprise one text, most notably perhaps in *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*, 1948, first begun in 1935, added to over the years, and then rewritten many times), are not necessarily cumulative. Each is intricately related to the words and imagery immediately surrounding it, but not bound to the overall shape of the narrative. Thus, Kawabata's writing has been likened to *renga* (long sequences of multi-authored linked verse, originating around the twelfth century).[5] Kawabata's writing is highly referential to the classic Heian-period *monogatari* (tale fiction) tradition, as attention is lavished on decorative details, such as the scent of perfectly brewed tea, or the crane-pattern adorning a kimono.[6] Causal or plotted elements are subordinated to descriptive aspects. This is the sort of "fetishization of the trivial" that also informed so much classical *monogatari* – such as the famous *The Tale of Genji*.[7] From Kawabata's *Thousand Cranes* (*Senbazuru*, 1949), "When a red oleander floods into bloom, the red against the thick green leaves is like the blaze of the summer sky; but when the blossoms are white, the effect is richly cool. The white clusters swayed gently, and enveloped Fumiko."[8] Kawabata's episodic brevity and reliance on contrastive images are believed born of early modern Japanese poetics such as the 17-syllable haiku. Edward Seidensticker wrote,

> Kawabata has been put, I think rightly, in a literary line that can be traced back to seventeenth-century haiku masters. Haiku are tiny seventeen-syllable poems that seek to convey a sudden awareness of beauty by a mating of opposite or incongruous terms. Thus the classical haiku characteristically fuses motion and stillness. Similarly Kawabata relies heavily on a mingling of the senses.[9]

An English translation of *Snow Country* was illustrated by the contemporary Japanese artist Kuwamoto Tadaaki with stark, bold, abstract shapes in red, white, and black.[10] Kuwamoto's visual interpretation of the text suggests that *Snow Country* indeed uses a prose narrative to explore the play of contrasts, colors, and shapes, and not simply to tell a story. In this sense Kawabata's reference to a literature that was as much about extra- and non-narrative textualities, such as visual, aural, or figural elements, is clear.[11] Yet I believe Kuwamoto's rejection of illustrations representative of traditional art forms in favor of modern abstract art was brilliant. What Kuwamoto appears to have understood is that Kawabata's references to convention are never recapitulations of the same, but thoroughly modernist in their redeployment of signifiers of tradition in innovative and non-traditional contexts.

Accordingly, characterizations of Kawabata as continuous with tradition must, I believe (as do many others who have written about Kawabata), be countered with the fact that Kawabata was also impacted by contemporary literary issues and debates. The indeterminate or overdetermined nature of Kawabata's fragmentary mining of Japanese literary and artistic convention is, of course, clearly modern and even modernist.[12] This fact did not escape all Kawabata commentary. Kosai Shinji mused,

> As I lay down my pen, now, I think, maybe, Kawabata Yasunari's symbolist aesthetics are, however, after all, dependent upon a tradition of "Japanese verse" (*Yamato uta*) that permeates throughout the *Kokinshū*, the *Shinkokinshū*, Basho's *haikai* [*renga*]. Nonetheless, the fact that I think the passage in *Snow Country* looks like Mallarme's symbolism, *The Lake* assimilates George Bataille's eroticism, and moreover *House of the Sleeping Beauties* even seems like it is a sort of Platonism [means that] this "essence" of our Heian aesthetics is imbued throughout with the essence of French symbolism.[13]

It is well known that prior to the war, Kawabata was affiliated with the Neo-Perceptionalist literary coterie (*Shin kankaku ha*, sometimes translated as Neo-Sensualist or New Senses School) during its formative stages in the 1920s. The coterie rejected the then-dominant naturalist literature that followed the principles of scientific observation and reportage. Kawabata's narratives emerge as influenced by, yet distinct from the group. In his "Shinshin sakka no shinkeikō kaisetsu" ("On the new directions of up and coming writers," 1925) Kawabata elucidated his belief that foregrounding sensory perception in the writing of literature would originate a *new* mode of Japanese literary expression.[14] Faithful to his own literary ideals as influenced by the Neo-Perceptionalists, Kawabata's narratives access the world through the varied perceptual senses. Accordingly, his characterizations are vibrantly tactile, auditory, and visual: a woman is described by the contrasts of black hair and white skin, the sound of her voice or the touch of her finger. Perhaps inspired by the haiku and *renga*, contrasts are indeed everywhere: stillness is offset by sudden movement, sadness by a moment of joy, the brightness of red against black, purity against the soiled. At the end of his life, Kawabata returned to an abbreviated form of impressionistic writing that he had experimented with toward the beginning of his writing career – short, descriptive, and often surrealist vignettes he called "palm of the hand stories" (*tanagokoro no shōsetsu*). Hence, one can easily characterize Kawabata's literary project as one that moved forward while gazing backwards – or one that incorporated and combined signifiers of premodernity in a quest for innovation and originality.

This incorporation or combination of references to and/or signifiers of now-canonized conventions is perhaps most overt in his Nobel prize acceptance speech. It wound its way through references to one traditional

Japanese art form after another, including poetry, landscape painting, and the tea ceremony – art forms that range over time from Heian to Edo and even into the twentieth century. On Ikenobō Sen'ō, he quotes: "'The ancients arranged flowers and pursued enlightenment.' Here we see an awakening to the heart of the Japanese spirit, under the influence of Zen"; two pages later, on the topic of Heian-period women-authored tale fiction (*monogatari*) Kawabata holds, "So was established a tradition which influenced and even controlled Japanese literature for eight hundred years."[15] In between a discussion of the Buddhists Ryōkan (1758–1831) and Ikkyū (1394–1481) he quotes the twentieth-century writer, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, "nature is for me more beautiful than it has ever been before. I have no doubt that you will laugh at the contradiction, for here I love nature even when I am contemplating suicide. But nature is beautiful because it comes to my eyes in their last extremity" (63–2). On the tea ceremony he wrote:

> The snow, the moon, the blossoms, words expressive of the seasons as they move one into another, include in the Japanese tradition the beauty of mountains and rivers and grasses and trees, of all the myriad manifestations of nature, of human feelings as well. That spirit, that feeling for one's comrades in the snow, the moonlight, under the blossoms, is also basic to the tea ceremony.
>
> (68)

These different arts and personages are linked as continuous in signification over history, in large part because of the dominance of the "natural" or "nature" as a conceit or inspiration. Elsewhere Kawabata put it: "To be natural, to be true to nature – this has been the basic principle pervading all the arts in Japan, both past and present."[16] *Thousand Cranes* laments the deteriorization of the (traditional art of the) tea ceremony in contemporary, modern, declining Japan. The mountainside to which protagonist Shimamura travels in *Snow Country* is facilely interpreted as symbolic of pre-industrialized Japan – a quest reiterated within the text in Shimamura's (unfulfilled) desire to find Chijimi linen, purported to still be snow-bleached in the pre-industrial manner. *Snow Country*, written before and during the war, valorizes a pre-industrial, pre-mass Japan, in which nature dominates, albeit neatly transposed into the periphery of a modern bourgeois context.

Kawabata's insistence that his literature, and that of the canon, is about nature notwithstanding, as he himself may have intuited given his description already cited, classical Japanese literature celebrated *mediated impressions* of the material world. In fact premodern Japanese literature was less about nature itself, and more about a *cultured* notion of nature.[17] For example, Andrew Feenberg has noted that "Haiku . . . are often said to be concerned with the experience of nature. But in fact they articulate the natural world poetically in all its rich emotional and historical associations without distinguishing a purely material content from the contributions of

culture and the subject."[18] The aesthetic rendering of the natural world in Kawabata likewise celebrates a nature anchored in a cultural specificity – and his acculturated apprehension and representation of nature has at its core a Zen Buddhist sensibility. Throughout his Nobel prize speech Kawabata quoted poems about Zen, written by Zen monks, connecting these Zen-inspired poems to a putative timeless essence of "the deep quiet of the Japanese spirit"(69), "the emotions of old Japan, and the heart of a religious faith" (65). Claiming that the premodern "Ikkyū of Zen comes home to me with great immediacy" (58), Kawabata concluded the speech with the following:

> Here we have the emptiness, the nothingness, of the Orient. My own works have been described as works of emptiness, but it is not to be taken for the nihilism of the West. The spiritual foundation would seem to be quite different. Dōgen entitled his poem about the seasons "Innate Reality," and even as he sang of the beauty of the seasons he was deeply immersed in Zen.
>
> (41)

Kawabata's rendering of Zen as *the* aesthetic sentiment of Japan throughout the ages is, however, a modern construct.

Let me digress for a moment. From Meiji onward, Western theories on aesthetics and other philosophic inquiry poured into Japan (alongside Western novels, texts on science and technology, health and hygiene, and other discursive and material imports). Aesthetics became a field within university by 1881.[19] However, the high academic discourses tended toward explications of Western aesthetic theory. There were apparently only limited philosophic treatments exclusively dedicated to inquiry into so-called traditional Japanese aesthetics. Among these were several essays, and later a thick study by philosopher Onishi Yoshinori attempting to apply logical rationalism to, and integrate with, Western aesthetical discourses the three categories he identified as the core of Japanese aesthetics: *yūgen* (mysterious depth), *aware* (strong emotive sense of the sad and beautiful transience of all things) and *sabi* (restrained melancholy or loneliness). Ueda Makoto notes that his studies were met with hostility. There was, held one reviewer, no need to dissect these categories, and moreover, wasn't everything that Onishi discovered in this contorted logical approach already a priori self-evident to all Japanese?[20] The point I want to make is not at all that Japanese aesthetics were unimportant to Japanese of the time. Rather, the objection to the separation of aesthetics out of discourses on ontology and culture pinpoints, I think, an important aspect of how aesthetics were then conceived in a rapidly modernizing Japan. That is, it evidences the prewar naturalization of an environmentally and ethnically particular "sensibility" as a constitutive component of Japanese *being*.

Aesthetics was of paramount importance; it was inseparable from (Japanese) being itself, in a manner not unlike that of the (in)famous national-

socialist philosopher Martin Heidegger, whose analysis of temporality in *Being and Time* Peter Osborne has summarized as "an aestheticization of ontology or ontologization of transcendental aesthetics."[21] In the works of eminent modern Japanese philosophers such as Nishida Kitarō, Miki Kiyoshi, and Watsuji Tetsurō, Japanese being is not only aestheticized, but also conceived as intertwined with an experiential-aesthetical immediacy.[22] And eventually all three of Onishi's categories become (well after the fact) linked to a Zen aesthetic.

By 1968 when Kawabata accepted his Nobel award, as Robert Sharf has convincingly argued, Zen Buddhism in particular signified something quite different than it had prior to the twentieth century, and had in fact become the favored vessel for this aesthetical-ontic constellation. With modernity, Zen had become linked to Japanese being, in a newly individualized formulation well suited to the modern subject. The result was that, unlike premodern Zen Buddhism, the "heart" of modern Zen now lay "in a private, veridical, often momentary 'state of consciousness.'"[23] But this private "state of consciousness" is simultaneously communal and national because it was perceived to be (potentially) shared by all Japanese. In other words, with Japan's modernity, the meaning of Zen shifted from an institutionalized religious practice by a dominant aristocratic-military minority to a subjectively individual, yet culturally communal, ontology available to the masses and linked to nationalism. In short, Zen Buddhism had been reconceptualized as "the ground of Japanese aesthetic and ethical sensibilities. Virtually all of the major Japanese artistic traditions are reinterpreted as expressions of the Zen experience, rendering Zen the metaphysical ground of Japanese culture itself."[24] Because the various arts are now all linked to Zen, and Zen to Japanese being, both Zen and being are at once aestheticized, nationalized, and bound to a type of contemplative experientialism.

Kawabata's Nobel prize speech expressed this sentiment as follows:

> Seeing the moon, he [the poet Myōe (1173–1232)] becomes the moon, the moon seen by him becomes him. He sinks into nature, becomes one with nature. The light of the "clear heart" of the priest, seated in the meditation hall in the darkness before the dawn, becomes for the dawn moon its own light.
>
> (71–70)

It must be acknowledged that Kawabata gestures toward defining this aesthetic as "pan-Asian" when he includes references to Chinese poets and substitutes the word "Oriental" for Japanese here and there.[25] But this gesture toward a common Asia must be recognized as an imaginary (mythic) Asia. This is not only because by 1968, China had become the People's Republic of China, but also simply because Ch'an Buddhism (the progenitor of Japanese Zen, originated in the early seventh century) and Buddhism in general in China had overwhelmingly waned before the philosophic dominance of Neo-Confucianism by the fourteenth century.[26] Kawabata's "Asia"

that is (still) unified through a Zen sentiment is therefore a thoroughly Orientalized Asia – frozen in its antiquity, completely aestheticized, stunningly ahistorical, and originating in negative difference from the so-called West. The Zen beliefs and practices that Kawabata discovers everywhere as he meanders (discursively, of course) through China and Japan, from Japan's earliest recorded writings to the present day, are all read as signifying homogeneously. The speech – in its modern interpretation of Zen – disavows the radical differences that history would discover in the various places, periods, and poets, let alone the differing meaning and practice of Zen (and Ch'an) itself over time and regime. (One might also argue that this pan-Asianism has an ominous undercurrent when one remembers how the mission of unifying all of Asia under Japan during the Second World War made use of similar notions of an "Asian" spiritism.)

It is then as a particularity unique to being Japanese that Kawabata drew inspiration from Zen. It was an inspiration that took the form of an individualized (yet nationally communal), subjective sensory-experience of contrast, transience, internal negation (or the dialectic of self-negation described by Nishida in which the temporal-[human]-historical self comes into being in relation to its simultaneous negation in space, and vice versa).[27] This aesthetical-ontic construct is, moreover, grafted onto a culturally particularized nature and manifested in the mythicized Japanese (Pan Asian) past – but a past that can be, and should be, reborn in the present/future. As Nishida put it, "The return of the past in our nation has always been the character of a renewal. It has never been a mere return to the past but always a step forward as the self-determination of the eternal present . . . In this history of our country, there was always a return to the Imperial Throne, a return to the past. This has never meant a return to the systems and culture of antiquity but has involved taking a step ahead in the direction of a new world."[28]

The question remains, however, as to how this avowedly peaceful, compassionate, and contemplative core of Kawabata's mobilization of signifiers of convention – from an acculturated nature to Zen – might be amenable to any kind of fascist agenda? To address this I must leave Kawabata himself aside for a while, and explain my use of the terms "fascism" and "fascist aesthetics."

2 Fascist aesthetics

First, I do not want to limit the term fascism, as some have espoused, to the geophysical and temporal specifities of European fascism beginning in the 1920s and ending in 1945. Instead I agree with Mark Neocleous, who argued (following Walter Benjamin) that such a conception of (European) fascism "ignores the fact that this development [fascism] was rooted in a particular set of philosophical debates rather than in a coherently organized political party or movement."[1] As Osborne wrote,

> as an object of reflection and inquiry, "fascism" is notoriously resistant to conventional forms of political and ideological analysis. Herein, in part, lies its significance: fascism problematizes "the political," while presenting itself as its truth. As such, it opens itself up to philosophical forms of interpretation and analysis which, while based on its history as a political movement, nonetheless of necessity exceed its bounds. From this perspective, fascism is no *merely* political form – one among a series of alternatives to be listed in the catalogues of comparative politics as competing forms of organization or rule – but a manifestation of deep-rooted historical, or even metaphysical, tendencies or possibilities of the age.[2]

Borrowing from Osborne the characterization of fascism as "no *merely* political form," and in the spirit of Roger Griffin and others, I am interested in a structural sort of analysis of the aesthetics and ethics, or relation to the other, within fascism as an ideological system shared with its otherwise variously particular historical-political manifestations including Nazi Germany, fascist Italy and France, as well as Japan.[3] I understand fascism as an historical development specific to the massification of society in relation to the rise of modern, industrial capitalism that attempts to solve the problem of class struggle ideologically rather than economically. I also understand fascism as a signifying system that employs a specific *typology* of images, sentiments, and slogans (although the *content* of these may vary) to enlist the masses in a collective, vitalist movement. To quote Neocleous at greater length:

> Fascism is a politics implicit in modern capitalism, involving mass mobilization for nationalist and counter-revolutionary aims, militarized activism and a drive for an elitist, authoritarian, and repressive state apparatus, articulated through a nebulous vitalist philosophy of nature and the will.
>
> [Fascism is] a counter-revolutionary phenomenon engaged in the prevention of communism, but which seeks none the less to provide an alternate revolutionary impetus to the social forces of mass society by mobilizing them through an aggressive nationalism . . . it is a form of reactionary modernism: responding to the alienation and exploitation of modern society but unwilling to lay down any serious challenge to the structure of private property central to modern capitalism, fascism can only set its compass by the light of reaction, a mythic past to be recaptured within the radically altered conditions of modernity.[4]

Second, as already suggested, although fascism can certainly be approached (and of course has often been so approached) by concentrating on its more concrete manifestations in political and military institutions and activities, in this study I am concerned with the aspect of fascist ideology that makes itself known as "aesthetics" and "culture" (but that is political in effect); these two, as Benjamin insisted, are equally integral to fascism. In their introduction to *Fascist Visions: Art and Ideology in France and Italy*, Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff explain:

> As Walter Benjamin argues in his seminal essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), fascism can be seen as a form of aestheticized politics in which aesthetic issues permeated all aspects of society; and the political, economic, and cultural realms should not be considered separately when discussing fascism. Rather than dismissing fascist ideology as a form of "false consciousness" as [Robert] Soucy does, *one should recognize the very real role of cultural production in the formation of groups and constituencies favorable to fascism*.[5]

In Benjamin's own words:

> The growing proletarianization of modern man and the increasing formation of masses are two aspects of the same process. Fascism attempts to organize the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves . . . The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into politics . . . Communism responds by politicizing art.[6]

Although it might appear at first glance that Benjamin sees fascism as a conflation of domains, it is actually the opposite. Andrew Hewitt has

written that here Benjamin "is arguing not simply that fascism somehow confuses aesthetics and politics but rather that maintaining a traditional differentiation between the two is itself potentially fascistic."[7] That is, art, be it literary, filmic, or visual, is always produced and received/consumed in a political circumstance with its attendant ideological context. Aesthetics, that severs the "interest" from the art, when injected into politics, makes a potentially murderous disinterest – war and death can become beautiful. More simply still, it can also be taken to suggest that there is no artistic stance or production that is purely objective, or freed from interest of any sort. Fascism is the potential, final culmination of the purification of domains that lies at the heart of art for the sake of art, or the attempt to ignore the sociopolitical and historical context of artistic production.

As Hewitt explains, for Benjamin,

> it is a decadent aesthetic, an aesthetic of *l'art pour l'art*, which is capable of refunctioning this [fascist] process of externalized destruction as a form of aesthetic, contemplative distance and consequently of enjoying destruction itself as an aesthetic event . . . the disinterested and contemplative stance of *l'art pour l'art* at once objectifies and totalizes the world as an aesthetic phenomenon and yet fragments that totality by locating the contemplative subject outside that to which, supposedly, there is no outside – namely, the world as totalized aesthetic artifact.[8]

Hence, it is an epistemological structure of purification of domains, including aesthetics as aesthetics, that Benjamin identifies at the base of both fascism and modernism. This is not to facilely and inaccurately claim no distinction between fascism and modernism (fascism is, of course, a *reactionary* modernism).[9] Karatani coined the phrase "aestheticentrism" to describe the *inflexible* purification (or bracketing off) of aesthetics as a domain (that also undergirds the Orientalist fascination with an aestheticized Asia). While modernism relies on a bracketing off, or purification of domains, the aestheticentrist naturalizes and fixes that purification.

> The aesthetic stance is established by bracketing other elements, but one should always be prepared to remove the brackets . . . However, the characteristic of aestheticentrists is that they forget to remove the brackets. They confuse the reality of the other with what is achieved by bracketing. Or they confuse their respect for beauty with respect for the other . . . Furthermore, aestheticentrism is at the core of fascism. Appearing to be anticapitalist, it attempts to aesthetically sublimate the contradictions of the capitalist economy.[10]

Kawabata, I think, was an aestheticentrist in this sense. As an aestheticentrist, he refused to unbracket his rendering of Japanese traditional culture or, as

Benjamin might have put it, he refused to politicize art – that is, he refused to refuse the depoliticization of what is already always political – but held steadfastly to the decadence of art for art's sake.

Susan Sontag has written about the "beauty" of fascism, "Fascism . . . stands for an ideal, and one that is also persistent today, under other banners: the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the reupidiation of the intellect; the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders)."[11] Rey Chow calls this fascism's positivism and positivity,

> The most important sentiment involved in fascism is not a negative but a positive one: rather than hatefulness and destructiveness, fascism is about love and idealism. Most of all it is a search for an idealized self-image through a heartfelt surrender to something higher and more beautiful. Like the Nazi officer who killed to purify his race, the Japanese soldier raped and slaughtered in total devotion to their emperor and in the name of achieving the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere." Like the Nazi concentration camp official who was genuinely capable of being moved to tears by a Beethovan sonata being played by Jewish prisoners, the Japanese officer, we may surmise, was probably also genuinely capable of being moved by the delicate feelings inscribed in cultured practices such as haiku poetry, calligraphy, or the tea ceremony. In each case, what sustains the aesthetics of monstrosity is something eminently positive and decent.[12]

Moreover, if fascism is further understood as a nationalistic reactionary modernism, then Kawabata's mobilization of tradition can be easily understood as amenable to appropriation by fascist agendas, or more simply, as complicit with fascist aesthetics. Reactionary modernism is a reaction against the threat to the dominant classes brought on by the modern massification of society that mobilizes the masses in favor of a new future overtly nostalgic for the past. And, it attempts to unite the masses and obscure class struggle through an ideology (propagated by images) of national homogeneity and superiority against an encroaching pollution threatened by modernity.

Let me be more specific. Above, I have characterized Kawabata's relationship with premodern literature as one that looks backward as it moves forward and as replete with a host of canonized signifiers of Japanese tradition in its quest for innovation. Griffin has argued that at the mythic core of fascism lies its "lowest common denominator" – "a palingenetic form of populist ultranationalism."[13] Griffin uses the term "palingenetic" to refer to "the sense of a new start or of regeneration after a phase of crisis or decline which can be associated just as much with mystical . . . as secular realities."[14] Palingenetic then connotes "a backward-looking nostalgia for a restoration of the past (in the sense of rebirth)" that "refers to the *future* as much as the

past . . . while appearing to be a reactionary turn to the past, in fact constitutes an orientation to the future."[15] Hence, fascism calls for a new order with terms such as restoration or regeneration; this restoration, of course, is to a purer time of "national" glory.[16]

In this sense, fascism also counters the progressive temporality of the modern with a "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" (and vice versa, the non-simultaneity of the simultaneous).[17] Osborne has argued that this is a "politics of time" that underpins both conservation revolutions and reactionary modernism.[18] As Jeffrey Herf has pointed out, the apparently paradoxical nature of this politics of time stems from an awareness that what conservative revolutions/reactionary modernist political movements mobilize to revitalize is believed to be something already lost, but in fact may indeed never have even existed as more than a possibility.[19] Hence Osborne paraphrases Herf to postulate that reactionary modernism seeks to realize this "past *for the first time.*"[20] Moreover, it is this politics of time in reactionary modernism that leads Osborne to claim:

> Reactionary modernism may be understood as a bad modernism; not (or not primarily) in a moral or political sense, but in terms of the contradiction internal to its temporal structure. This structure – the structure of radical reaction within and against modernity – is of necessity contradictory, since one of the things it aims to reverse is the production of the very temporality to which it is itself subject. Radical reaction cannot but reproduce, and thereby performatively affirm, the temporal form of the very thing against which it is pitted (modernity). Hence the necessity for it to misrepresent its temporal structure to itself as some kind of "recovery" or "return."[21]

In a similar vein, nuancing Jean-François Lyotard's characterization of fascism as a "messianic sublime in which the inexpressible is projected into the realm of history as an expectation and anticipation" of the coming of a new age and a new people, Hewitt argues that presence itself is problematized in this fascist anticipation. "The *Volk* is *both* the anticipated presence – mythified, as Lyotard points out, historicized within a form of messianism – *and* the subject posing the question."[22] The lost history to be regenerated in the future is paradoxically absent in the present, yet present in the personification of the individual as a living member of the *Volk*.

That this politics of time requires, at its core, a sense of loss should be obvious. Griffin stresses the importance of a perception of decay, decadence, and corruption of the present moment as integral to the development of palingenetic myth. Benjamin has suggested that the experience of loss in the First World War – and the attempt to represent that loss – was an integral element fertilizing the growth of German fascism.[23] Rephrasing Benjamin, Hewitt terms this the "ontologization of a (historical) loss" whereby,

> In the reconstruction of a (national) identity, the very concept of "loss" is already recuperative: implying something that has been lost, it posits lack as the absence of a historical and ontological (or national) presence. More than this, however, the ontologization of loss ensures that loss can never be lost, since it becomes the very condition of national identity.[24]

Quite unlike Germany, Japan entered the Second World War as the military victor of its recent wars (in Russia and China). But Japan was in the midst of a *cultural* crisis that was widely experienced as loss. From Meiji through the early 1920s Japan had eagerly and enthusiastically embraced modernity and Westernization with which it was inextricably intertwined. But by the late 1920s and early 1930s the mood had radically changed. Najita and Harootunian wrote that "It was precisely because Japanese saw the urgency of keeping their culture uncontaminated and hence preserving its essence against the threatened external pollution that many felt justified using militant forms of political and cultural action."[25] It is important to add that this urgency felt toward protecting a cultural purity was the result of a perception of *loss that had already happened*, as the writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's words from 1933 perhaps best describe:

> *What losses we have suffered*, in comparison with the Westerner. The Westerner has been able to move forward in ordered steps, while we have met superior civilization and have had to surrender to it, and we have had to leave a road we have followed for thousands of years.
>
> In recent years the pace of progress has been so precipitous that conditions in our own country go somewhat beyond the ordinary. The changes that have taken place since the Restoration of 1867 must be at least as great as those of the preceding three and a half centuries.
>
> No matter what complaints we may have, Japan has chosen to follow the West, and there is nothing for her to do but move bravely ahead and leave us old ones behind . . . I have written all this because I have thought that there might still be somewhere, possibly in literature or the arts, where something could be saved. I would call back at least for literature this world of shadows that we are losing.[26]

This sentiment of cultural loss took many different manifestations – philosophic, political, literary, to name a few – which collectively expressed the anxiety that something irretrievable had been lost to Japanese culture with the precipitous process of modernization-Westernization. And it was this cultural loss that laid at least a portion of the ideological groundwork for the support of the Pacific War by many intellectuals and politicians. In his short article on the 1930s pan-Asianism of the Western-educated, liberal politician Nagai Ryūtarō, Peter Duus places this perception of cultural loss

at the matrix of Nagai's (surprising) support of the Pacific War. Nagai called for a unified Asia against white imperialism because,

> Like others of his generation, Nagai did not regard the "successes of Meiji" as a source of undiluted pride as a Japanese. It was obvious that the creation of modern Japan had not been a spontaneous undertaking of the Japanese, as the creation of a modern West had been . . .
>
> Success in war did not necessarily establish the nation's cultural worth. To Nagai, it seemed that although Japan had been a military and diplomatic victor, she *remained a cultural loser* . . . the defeat of China and Russia made Japan a great power, but not a great civilization.[27]

One might in this sense adapt Hewitt's argument and claim that the Japanese nation-state ontologized that cultural loss. That is, it positioned loss as intrinsic to current Japanese being – hence loss became a sort of presence that stood in for that which was absent (i.e., traditional culture itself), as the Pacific War began.[28]

Moreover, the link between the perception of cultural loss and the sanctification of nature in Japan (which, it must be reiterated, is second nature, or acculturated nature, not nature itself) could not be more clear. As modernity-Westernization had irrevocably altered the relation of human to nature, Japanese traditional culture – that supposedly resided still in remote, pre-industrialized provinces like that of *Snow Country* – was imagined to be a potential source for a new age of Eastern sensibility. Against the "divisiveness of modern political and social relations" from Meiji through the 1930s, fundamentalist agrarianists such as Kita Ikki (1883–1937), Gondō Seikei (1868–1937), Inoue Nisshō (1886–1967), and Tachibana Kōsaburō (1893–1974) called for a new "return" to an agrarian and communalist Asia, in which the people were now bound naturally to the Japanese emperor.[29] The more radical of the agrarianists advocated violent means to achieve these ends, but even for those who sought peaceful change,

> The people were seen as an embodiment of a common essence that derived from the local land and the tutelary shrines that defined all within a marked-off space as "brothers" under the divine protection of spiritual entities. Far from the corrupt cities and the sites of industrial capitalism, the possibility of communal brotherhood, the agrarianists believed, *continued to exist as an accessible reality, even though in recent times it had been attacked by the forces of modernity*.[30]

Maruyama Masao wrote that Kōsaburō, one of the leading fascist ideologues who railed against Marxist socialism, also praised "the life bound to the soil in the following words":

> Man's world will be eternal so long as the bright sun is over his head and his feet are planted on the ground . . . What is tilling the soil if not the very basis of human life? . . . Only by agrarianism can a country become eternal, and this is especially the case with Japan. Japan never could, and never can, be herself if she is separated from the soil.[31]

As in Nazi Germany, the naturalization of culture by the prewar Japanese agrarian-communalism did not halt at landscape but endeavored to conceive of the nation itself as a "natural entity rather than an imagined community."[32] Modernity is believed to have polluted nature, while

> focusing on the natural allows fascism to highlight the issue of land and its importance to the people and the nation. The Nazi "blood and soil" doctrine for example, is suggestive of an intimate connection between the blood of the people (nation) and the soil of the land (nature), expressing the unity of a racial people and its land . . . ideologically fascism does not merely "respect" nature: it sanctifies and spiritualizes it. For fascism the philosophical distinction between man and nature is an artificial product of rationalist philosophy and science.[33]

Moreover, a naturalized connection between the land of Japan and its ethnic populace was being made in philosophic discourses as well. The most famous example is that of Watsuji Tetsurō whose 1935 *Fūdo* (*Climate and Culture*) linked natural environment to national character.[34] The Kyoto school Buddhists also attempted a similar naturalization of nation and support of (ultra) nationalism, "explicitly connecting 'blood and soil' with the Japanese state."[35] In these renderings nature becomes the hallmark of the spiritual, in a manner not all that different from how nature is configured in Kawabata's valorization of Zen as the "natural essence" of the Oriental sensibility. (And of course fascist ideology valorizes vitalism and faith over rational doctrine in a way not unlike religions, including Zen.)[36] While Zen itself was of course not intrinsically fascist, it met fascist ideology's need to sanctify nature and the nation.

> The sanctification of nature is simultaneously the sanctification of the nation as the natural collective unit. The integral connection between the idea of a national spirit and the spiritual concept of nature focuses attention on this nature, that is, the land of this nation, and the role it plays in shaping national character and identity. A geographically specific nature forms the mediating link between the sanctification of nature and the nationalist impulse . . .
>
> To mobilize the masses in an anti-communist fashion, fascism "nationalizes" the masses, that is, reconstitutes the working class as part of the nation, presenting the struggle of the nation in terms of a

> mysticism of nature; the nation in motion fulfils its historic role by realizing its natural spirit – the will to power.[37]

Structurally, fascism is one potential reaction to the modern crisis over representation at its "deepest" level – or, about the anxiety over the potential slippage between reality and how that real is represented, in image, slogan, or text. This anxiety is, of course, first and foremost the anxiety and sense of alienation over the radical social, political, economic, and other shifts that marked the entry into modernity (and capitalism). Harootunian explains:

> The problem was linked to the specialization of knowledge that had characterized the commitment to instrumental rationality and a division of labor that marked off the modern from all preceding epochs . . . [S]pecialization of knowledge and the installation of a new division of labor distorted and thus separated a world once thought to have been whole but which now lay in fragments . . . What modernist discourse in Japan, and elsewhere, confronted was the crisis of modernity over the stability and reliability of forms of representation. While this crisis was manifested throughout the modernizing world . . . in Japan it was inflected in discussions over the form best suited to represent lived experience in social circumstances dominated by the ever new in the ever same . . . the auratic endowment of culture-memory . . . and the experience of the communal body . . . This crisis, then, was over the forms most capable of relaying and communicating the lived experience – the experience of genuine difference – and securing accessibility to a memory that was being shattered into splinters by speed, shock, and sensation . . .
>
> [In Japan] The crisis was inflected into claims of cultural authenticity and diverse efforts to recall the eternal forms of community outside of history (and thus immune to the social abstractions of capitalism). Yet this particular inflection of the crisis of representation invariably worked to yoke modernism (seeking to resolve the question of representation) to fascism (aiming to resolve the problem of political representation), combining ideologemes the state subsequently but selectively appropriated for national mobilization and war in the late 1930s.[38]

Moreover, as many have argued, fascism masquerades as that which it is not. It is narcissistically invested in its own representation for the sake of representation.[39] Within the fascist order, signification itself (meaning) and "true" subjectivity founded on self-recognition through the radical difference of the other are replaced with a performative identification with the other (refusal of difference). Hence, meaning itself is evacuated. In semiotic terms, this evacuated subjectivity mirrors the evacuation of content in fascist slogans and images. In the fascist solution to the anxiety caused by

radical alterity (the Other), that constitutes a wholesale rejection of dialogue for a combination of *images* of sublation (the shared mission and communalism of the *Volk* or the Japanese equivalent of *minzoku* that functions to elide class distinctions) and annihilation strategies (the Jews, communists), there is an implicit refusal of the subject/object distinction that is at the core of the politics of representation itself. Permitted, then, is only the ("false") image of the same. This is, in other words, a sort of short-circuiting of the constitutive instability of the sign in an attempt at fixing signification. However, fascism itself remains unrepresentable, "If fascism somehow defies representation, it has nevertheless been represented with obsessive frequency at any number of discursive levels – not least of all as a marker (if not a representation) of the historical dilemma of unrepresentability."[40]

Hence, it should now be clear that I want to think about fascism, to borrow from Michel Foucault,

> as not only historical fascism, the fascism of Hitler and Mussolini – which was able to mobilize and use the desires of the masses so effectively – but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us.[41]

As Neocleous put it, "Far from being some kind of political aberration arising from the inability of small but active groups to grasp the essentials of 'civilized' bourgeois life, fascism is in fact a problem of the 'normal' organization of our lived relations."[42] In other words, my study follows Benjamin, Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and others, in its concern for the banality of daily fascism, or the fascism in all of us. This concept links fascism to the mechanics of desire and its repression in modern, mass, capitalist societies. It is the fascism that inheres in the myriad forms of the daily murder – metaphoric or actual – of the other.

Building on the notion of daily, banal fascism, Klaus Tweleit's landmark *Male Fantasies* helped to show (quite differently from Deleuze) how, in Nancy Locke's words:

> fascism is already implicit in the daily relationships of men and women . . . it is a matter of bodies, desires, relationships; it is what shapes his [Tweleit's] subjects' fears and imaginings. Such an association between fascism and sexuality, including its fantasies of violence, does not make fascism a historical aberration . . . It sees fascism in its everyday forms.[43]

My study reframes this notion of daily relationships, or banal fascism, in the context of relation to the other (sublation, annihilation, alterity, or less extreme solutions to the problematic of difference) as I have already described it. It is this critical move that makes it possible to make an

analogy between the *structural* relation to the other that operates in sexist, ethnicist, racist, or aestheticist positionings, and fascist aesthetics, even in the absence of nationalism, which of course is at the core of political fascism and fascist ideology proper. Fascist ideology and aesthetics have a sliding scale by which otherness is evaluated – and by which solutions to the anxiety that alterity produces may be assuaged.

Nazi extermination of the Jews, for example, shares an underlying structure of relation to the other that also informed Japanese domination/colonization of other Asians, and even informs male domination of women. That is, a Jew cannot be turned into an Aryan, but this logic also dictates that, because of "blood" neither can a Chinese become a Japanese, nor (because of genitals as well as temperament) a woman a man. Alterity, of the sort that cannot be sublated into the homogeneity of the same, is *hierarchized* in this structure, with varying degrees of violence. That is, it is not merely the biological impossibilities that matter here, it is the hierarchical structuration of the categories of just who is worthy of (full) humanity or inclusion and the way in which difference is apprehended and handled. This structure comprises an ideological inclusion of a (limited) specified group perceived to share sexed/racial/ethnic attributes as human (or just more human) by virtue of those biological ("natural") attributes, and thus the rightful possessors of certain privileges, or powers. The de-humanization (or lesser humanization), and the concurrent imbalance of power and wealth, of a segment of the (national/colonized) human population for biological factors, is indebted to a biological determinism that shares a certain naturalized structuration with fascist ethics. Japan's colonization of, for example, Taiwanese and Koreans as "lesser Asians" is more like the sexed structuration, which exploits the so-called natural role of women under the guidance of the superior male, than the far more brutal solution to the notion of biological privilege in the Nazi doctrine of racial extermination, or the ethnicist version of the Japanese rape and massacre of Chinese in Nanking.

3 Kawabata and fascist aesthetics

To bring the previous two chapters into some sort of a dialogue, I want first to return to the dominance of the so-called natural in Kawabata's texts, which, as I have already noted, is nowhere wild and rampant; it is the cultured garden, tamed by the human hand, or the mountains made docile in poetry. Objects (and women) seen in mirrors or through glass, for example, are transformed into what they should or could be, which surpasses that which they are. I want to stress that this "ought" however, *is inherent in the type of contemplation by the subject rather than in a transformation of the object itself*.

In this sense, Kawabata's narrative-aesthetic gesture toward reordering the world as it ought to be, or the movement to reconstruct the real for greater aesthetical pleasure, must be understood not as merely indifferent, but as antithetical to political or social activism. Representation repeatedly surpasses reality, hence again recalling fascist politics of representation in the short-circuiting of the sign and the fixing of signifiers. This reordering of nature into second nature is also a bracketing of the aesthetical object outside of sociohistorical context or framing it within a particularized, cultural, lived experience, that problematizes ethical praxis.[1] In this epistemological construct, the transformation of the "is" into the "ought" is a process of apprehending the universal in the particular and not about rethinking the putatively transcendental and a priori order. And that order, for most intellectuals, writers, as well as philosophers of the 1930s and early 1940s, had already been collapsed within a naturalization of the imperial system as the manifestation of the universal. This mediated nature is, to reiterate, particularized as "naturally" Japanese. According to Agustín Jacinto Zavala, Nishida viewed

> The emperor system as a microcosm that mediates a wider historical macrocosm, perhaps even *the* historical macrocosm . . . Nishida linked the Imperial Throne [not necessarily the emperor as an individual] to tradition by seeing the former as the spatio-temporal "place" (*basho*) at which the historical world of the *kokutai* [national polity] is founded: "As a self-determination of the absolute present, the Imperial Throne is

> the center from which everything originates and develops . . . All material things belongs [*sic*] to the public domain . . . to the world of the Imperial Throne . . . That everything originates from the Imperial Throne and to it returns is the quintessence of our country."[2]

Hence, it is not simply "passivity" to what is, (although some critics of Nishida such as Ichikawa have focused on this point), but the structure of discovering being itself, as well as the ethically and ontologically correct in the actuality of the Japanese imperial system, in the body of the emperor, and in the system's aestheticized culture. It is perceiving the *institution* as the concrete specificity within which resides the abstract universality, or to borrow Buddhist terminology, *fixing* dharma in the actuality of the imperial system.

A reactionary politics of time (looking backward while moving forward, and a simultaneity of the non-simultaneous), aestheticentism (or *inflexible* purification of domain), and spiritualized nature are clearly present in the mythic reconceptualization of Zen as the "ground" of Japanese culture evident in Kawabata's Nobel prize speech, which sanctifies a specifically Japanized acculturation of nature as well as aestheticizes Japanese being (or ontologizes transcendental aesthetics). They are also present in his essays that call for (and literature that attempts to formulate) a new mode of Japanese literature inspired by the canon and in his disavowal of Western modernist influences. In addition, it can be argued that Kyoto school Zen also has a "politics of time" that postulates a simultaneity of the non-simultaneous. It is no stretch to postulate that against precipitous modernization that was in Japan essentially intertwined with Westernization and a growing proletarian movement in the 1920s through the early 1930s, Kawabata proposed a reactionary modernism. In place of political praxis, Kawabata retreated into the purified domain of a culturally exceptionalized and essentialized aesthetic of the past to be regenerated in the present so as to guard the future against the pollution of modernity and rationalism.

The myth at the core of Kawabata's reactionary modernism – that invents an unchanging, culturally particular, Japanese past imbued with a nature bound to the Zen aesthetic – thus takes the place of history.[3] This is not unlike how, in National Socialism, the notion of the past glory of nature-human harmony becomes fixed in the notion of the *Volk*. Indeed, Neocleous argues that this is endemic to fascist ideology, "Having emptied reality of history, fascist myth fills it with nature."[4] The varied class violences of the empowered aristocracy of the Heian, the warring factions of Kamakura-Muromachi (roughly 1186–1573, which included religious wars between the various sects in the battle for power), and of the centralized feudalism of the Edo Period are obliterated in the recirculation of "tradition" divested of history. Class struggle, the brutality of the samurai class, the dehumanization of the outcastes, the abuses of the various temples, the starving peasants, and the rice riots all disappear alongside the contemporaneous

march toward fascism. As Kawabata retreated into an aestheticized past imaginary, the current moment and its modernity were simultaneously increasingly disavowed. Kawabata's mission, so to speak, was precisely to realize this past in the present – in terms of *representation*. One can also describe this as a tension in which the real or material reality (history) is disavowed, and replaced with an aestheticized, acculturated, mediated, and subjective representation of the real (myth).

Of course, the aesthetics and politics of representation that I am describing above, although they may well structurally and even thematically share much with those of fascist systems, in the absence of a fascist movement would not seem particularly sinister. But these aesthetics become potentially monstrous when they are used to justify brutality. Here it is good to remember that at the same time as Kawabata resolutely turned rhetorically to the Japanese past, the Japanese nation-state was also resolutely marching toward fascism. In 1934 Kawabata was appointed a member of the Literary Discussion Group – a group organized by the Public Security Division of the Japanese Home Ministry to ensure literary cooperation with ever-tightening government control of literature in its fascist-imperialist interests. His aestheticentrism was at the very least not viewed as threatening to fascist interests, and more unsettling is the fact that an early version of *Snow Country* was awarded the third annual literary prize by this same (fascist) Literary Discussion Group in 1937.[5]

In general, many writers and intellectuals supported the war, but even those who had reservations overwhelmingly expressed no overt resistance. Ben-Ami Shillony writes:

> Postwar Japanese historians have tried hard to uncover evidence of "resistance" in wartime Japan, but they had to reconcile themselves to the fact that there were neither underground organizations which fought the regime nor noteworthy instances of open defiance. After the first burst of wartime enthusiasm had died down, and when the military setbacks began to occur, some intellectuals felt uneasy about the war and the regime, but their discontent did not amount to organized opposition . . . Ienaga Saburō claims that many intellectuals expressed passive resistance by simply continuing their normal activities . . . However, the pursuit of one's scholarly or literary work in time of war does not necessarily signify protest. It may serve the goals of a repressive regime interested in maintaining a business-as-usual atmosphere.[6]

Kawabata was one of those writers whose wartime activities first took the form of an overall maintaining of "business-as-usual." Apparently his feelings toward the war were ambivalent and changed over the years. Attempts to write about, if not the political significance and actual events of the war (which would have been, it must be acknowledged, censored anyway), at least the emotional confusion of the people gave way in these texts to a

passive acceptance rather than passive resistance. Kawabata, like so many others of his generation, in the end supported the war. "Kawabata indicated that now as the 'Japanese race', which had situated the emperor at its center, there was nothing to be done but participate in the war."[7]

Importantly, Kawabata fiercely *sharpened* his insistence that the essence of his own writing was grounded in the tradition of Japanese verse during the Second World War.[8] Many of Kawabata's wartime publications – such as *Bokka* (*Pastoral Song*, 1937–8) and *Tōkaidō* (*The Tokaido Highway*, 1943) – seek peace and solace in a mythic past that is nationalized in the search to revitalize premodern Japan. These narratives did reference the context of Japan at war (as did *Kōgen* [*Heights*, 1943–5]) and even appear to lament that context to the degree permitted by censors, encouraging some critics, including Kobayashi Yoshihito, to argue that alongside the wartime turn toward Japaneseness and nature, *Bokka*, for example, evidenced an "anti-war" gesture.[9] However, this retreat into an acculturated, specifically Japanese nature should of course be now understood as in itself complicitous with fascist ideology. Moreover, on closer consideration, it turns out that what looks like "references to the war" in these wartime narratives are not exactly references to the existing war. Rather, as Hatori Tetsuya wrote:

> In order to make the contemporaneous war accommodate his notion of the spirit of Japanese culture, the war [that Kawabata wrote about in these narratives] could not be one in service to Japanese supremacy and the domination of another ethnic group (*minzoku*) by the Japanese race (*minzoku*). To the contrary, it would have to be a war in which the [Japanese] self perishes and dissolves into the other, or one could equate it with a war of sublation in which the self is fused with the other. This notion is there in both *Bokka* and *Kōgen* and in *Tōkaidō*, I think you can see it [the notion of this spirit] in [Kawabata's] attempt to introduce it as a solid foundation in the archaic basis of Japanese cultural tradition.
>
> Kawabata could not oppose the war during the war. He had to accept it like one accepts fate. But while accepting the war, he hoped it would not be a war [fought] to promote the ego[ism] of the Japanese race (*minzoku*), but instead be a war that took the form of dissolving Japan into the world. However, because there was a gap between his hope and his ideal and the real war, Kawabata never finished writing (*chūzetsu*) *Tōkaidō* or *Bokka* – [texts] which, at least to some degree, tried to deal honestly with the age and the war. In the end, caught up in the flow of history that no single individual had power over, Kawabata could only fix his gaze on the sadness of individual (*hitotsu hitotsu*) lives that were tossed about in that flow.[10]

Hence, even those texts such as *Bokka* that (originally) resisted a complete "bracketing" outside of the sociopolitical context (as *Snow Country*

did) merely turned the actual war into a fictitious one after Kawabata's personal preference. What looks like an attempt to grapple with the war is more accurately the replacement of the "real" war with an imaginary one. Against the background of soldiers being called into service and deployed, *Kōgen*'s protagonist Suda sinks into reverie, imagining a world peopled with biracial (mixed-blood) children – inspiring Hatori Kazuei to dub this (in *katakana*) "cosmopolitanism" in a 1970 essay.[11] The imaginary war of *Bokka* and *Kōgen* disavows Japanese "egoism" and in its place proposes a deflection away from the real, or material, political reality, and toward a mediated, imaginary transformation of this real (world). As Hirakawa Sukehiro argued, it was during the war that Kawabata's aesthetic sensibility was sharpened, to the point that "like waving a magic wand, his pen and eyes totally transformed the ugly, or that which one expects to be filthy, into something beautiful and pure . . ."[12] The aestheticization of war in some of his narratives is, I believe, ominous, given the context of the actual war in which he wrote and published those texts. Thematically or contextually, this short-lived gesture toward writing the "war" (which must be understood as I have just described it, and not confused with any attempt at historicization) is thus in Kawabata constitutively paired with a reactionary modernism. Increasingly his protagonists sought solace in mythic representations of Japan's past and an aestheticization of war. The real war of "egoism" and tyranny is transformed into a more acceptable, even "pure," war of self-depreciation and apparent cosmopolitanism (dare I say: a beautiful war?) and death becomes one of Kawabata's favorite occasions for the celebration of beauty.[13]

But where, one might ask, are the "real" politics in this acculturation of nature and aestheticization of death and war? (Kobayashi, after all, finds this aestheticization and retreat into nature to constitute a resistance to the war.)[14] It helps to remember that fascist propaganda largely *downplays* economic and political issues in favor of foregrounding feelings and affects and aims at inciting the masses by using images, intuition, and sentiment.[15] The aesthetical construct at the core of Kawabata's politics of representation encompasses many elements that such theorists as Benjamin, Chow, Griffin, Hewitt, Neocleous, and Sontag have analyzed as integral and endemic to fascist ideology, aesthetics, and propaganda: a mythic, naturalized past in the present (palingenetic myth), aestheticentrism (that also aestheticizes death), the dissolution of self into community, surface image over deep signification, an ontologization of cultural loss, and more.

In contrast to the harsh postwar self-reevaluation undertaken by the majority of Japanese intellectuals, artists, and writers, Tsuji Kunio quotes Kawabata fortifying this positioning *after* the loss of the war: "From now on I will probably tend toward Japanese style traditionalism and classicism."[16] One of the most ardently political postwar writers, arguably far more representative of 1968 Japan than Kawabata, and winner of Japan's second Nobel prize for literature, Ōe Kenzaburō strongly rejected

Kawabata's aesthetical Japan in *his* Nobel prize speech, "Japan, The Ambiguous, and Myself." "As someone living in present-day Japan and sharing bitter memories of the past, I cannot join Kawabata in saying 'Japan, the Beautiful, and Myself.'"[17] Claiming that he felt no connection whatsoever to the Zen aesthetic permeating Kawabata's earlier Nobel prize speech, Ōe did not hesitate to add:

> In the history of modern Japanese literature, the writers most sincere in their awareness of a mission were the "postwar school" of writers who came into the literary scene deeply wounded by the catastrophe of war . . . They tried with great pain to make up for the atrocities committed by Japanese military forces in Asia.[18]

Flatly refusing the ahistorical, mythic imaginary of Japan found in Kawabata's speech, Ōe went so far as to resolutely historicize this vagueness or mythic ahistoricity. He did so by repeatedly referencing the aggressive imperialism of Japan during the Second World War, and acknowledging how Western influences had for his generation virtually replaced the Japanese conventions so valorized in Kawabata's speech. Moreover, Ōe claimed that the fascist "does not confront the outside world, *he merges with it*."[19] The merging of Shimamura with the natural universe mediated by poetry (Bashō) can easily be compared to the fascist's "dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feeling of the community." Or, one might paraphrase Emmannuel Lévinas to charge Kawabata's aestheticized war (a "war in which the [Japanese] self perishes and dissolves into the other . . . a war of sublation in which the self is fused with the other") with being nothing other than precisely the sort of ethics (or relation to the other) which, by disavowing true alterity or difference through an integration of self and other constitutes an integration that is "cruelty and injustice" because it in actuality obliterates the other.[20]

4 Virgins and other little objects

In vain your image comes to meet me
And does not enter me where I am who only shows it
Turning towards me you can find
On the wall of my gaze only your dreamt-of shadow.

I am that wretch comparable with mirrors
That can reflect but cannot see
Like them my eye is empty and like them inhabited
By your absence which makes them blind.[1]

The previous chapter described Kawabata's aesthetic ethics as a disavowal of history (difference) and a radical reconstruction of reality that is on many levels complicitous with fascist aesthetics. This chapter will turn its attention away from Kawabata's general narrative aesthetics in relation to the sociopolitical real so as to explore the narrative mediation of reality – that is complicated by a copresent desire for the Real or by a gesture toward a psychoanalytic ethics. To do so I pursue a close reading of the look that incorporates psychoanalytic analyses of the Gaze, relation to desire, and relation to the Other, focusing primarily on two texts: *Snow Country* and *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (*Nemureru bijo*, 1960–1).[2] In other words, I will turn my attention to the issue of relation between individuals (rather than imagined communities) and individuals' relations to desire, as depicted in Kawabata's narratives. This chapter also genders the discussion to argue that, for Kawabata, women appear to embody the tension between the aestheticized mediation of reality and the desire for the Real more perfectly than other narrative mechanisms.[3] I begin by exploring a reciprocity in how Kawabata represented women in relation to his narrative aesthetics and how that representation affected those aesthetics. I proceed to relate Kawabata's (in)famous virgin fetish to the aestheticizing-acculturating disavowal of the other and reality, yet complicated by a copresent drive toward indices of the abject, hence, arbiters of the Real.[4] This chapter explores how relation to the other functions structurally both like and

unlike the disavowal of history already discussed. Finally, I return to the question of whether this textual ethics resonates or not with fascist aesthetics, and how it may or may not gesture towards a psychoanalytic ethics.

In beautiful and poetic prose, *Snow Country* recounts the repeated sojourns of a middle-aged Tokyo dilettante, Shimamura, at an inn on the snowy western coast of Japan and his intermittent erotic dalliance with a young geisha-in-training, Komako. While Komako appears to love Shimamura, he is fascinated by the younger, purer Yoko, with whom he feels a deep, inexplicable connection from the moment he first sees her.[5] Quantitatively, the narrative focuses on Shimamura's encounters with Komako. The qualitatively more powerful passion of Shimamura for Yoko frames, and is embedded within the dominant story of Komako and Shimamura. Steadily Komako "ages" (in Shimamura's gaze; a more exact term might be "matures"). Conversely, the untouched (by Shimamura) Yoko endures as an object of beauty and desire, her decay halted by her untimely death at the narrative's conclusion.

The text opens on Shimamura aboard a train traversing the snowy countryside. He sees Yoko reflected over the passing scenery in the train window. A light projected from the mountains, shining in the reflection of Yoko's face, is to Shimamura "inexpressible beauty" (9). As the modern train travels the old country, the shape and contours of the landscape and Yoko's face, the play of changing light, the sensations of coldness and steam, the high pitch of Yoko's voice in the dark night, the flow of time and space, are all given equal narrative attention. A sample passage yields:

> The mountain sky still carried traces of evening red. Individual shapes were clear far into the distance, but the monotonous mountain landscape, undistinguished for mile after mile, seemed all the more undistinguished for having lost its last traces of color. There was nothing to catch the eye and it seemed to flow along in a wide, unformed emotion. That was of course because the girl's face floated over it. Cut off by the face, the evening landscape moved steadily by around its outlines. The face too seemed transparent – but was it really transparent? Shimamura had the illusion that the evening landscape was actually passing over the face, and the flow did not stop to let him be sure it was not.
>
> (9–10)

Here, as elsewhere in Kawabata's corpus, characters repeatedly observe and record their psychic-emotive reactions to an ever-changing environment. As Masao Miyoshi wrote quite some time ago, Kawabata appears to be concerned with documenting the passage of time, or recording human effort to make time substantial.[6] But this passage of time is "natural" and never "historical." Hence, when characters become active, their occasional deeds yield only questionable power over the greater forces of time. Trees shed their leaves in fall, human beauty fades over time, people age and die,

wars happen – regardless of human effort. Human events, moreover, are framed within the cycles of seasonal changes, highlighting nature, transience, and the ephemerality of human existence. Throughout Kawabata's corpus, there is a mood, one might call it, of melancholic capitulation to what is. Within this passivity to fate, or possibly the passage of time, is a simultaneous, intense, momentary attention to the sensually beautiful, the emotively moving, and to life itself.

I have already called Kawabata an aestheticentrist – or one whose bracketing of the beautiful is inflexible. Within those brackets, not only do contrasts and transience heighten aesthetic and experiential appreciation, but also art should celebrate the projected, reflected, or refracted object, which is far more beautiful than the object itself, as I have also already noted. The ultimate mediations possess the qualities of translucence and reflection.[7]

> In the depths of the mirror the evening landscape moved by, the mirror and the reflected figures like motion pictures superimposed one on the other. The figures and the background were unrelated, and yet the figures, transparent and intangible, and the background, dim in the gathering darkness, melted together into a sort of symbolic world not of this world. Particularly when a light out of the mountains shone in the center of the girl's face, Shimamura felt his chest rise at the inexpressible beauty of it. (9)

One effect of this aesthetic is the undercutting of drama, or a sense of detachment that, as narrated through Shimamura's perspective in *Snow Country*, is shared with the reader. Fortifying this detachment, distance, or disinterest, erotic and sensual pleasures become ecstatic only when consummation is impossible. Shimamura, as many have noted, not only cannot truly love – he cannot cathect. Okude Ken, for example, described Shimamura's stance toward reality and other people (such as Komako) with words that translate into terms quite similar to mine: *kyomukan* (nihilism or emptiness), *mukanshin* (disinterest), and *mukandōsei* (lack of affect), linking this stance with what he calls the "dark period" spanning the prewar into the war.[8] For Kawabata, distance and the unattainable are established as the enabling conditions for the purest sensual appreciation. Shimamura, a specialist in Western ballet, has refused to see an actual performance. By accessing ballet entirely through distanced representations, such as essays and photographs, he is free to construct his own version of the art, upon which reality should not (and he will not let it) intrude. Other activities or objects, such as Komako's diaries or mountain climbing also lend themselves to his aesthetic approval precisely because they are without purpose or utility or, in his words, constitute "wasted effort." Kawabata's narratives have a resolute commitment to image and form, while causal or plotted elements are subordinated to descriptive aspects. Overwhelmingly,

descriptions do not appear to differentiate nature and human-as-object (in this case, Yoko). Matsuura Hisaki had this to say:

> When Kawabata Yasunari gazes intently at human beings it is the same gaze with which he gazes intently at antique curios. That's it; after all, nothing needs to be said (*kotoba nado hassuru hitsuyō wa nai*) if he looks at human faces the same way that he looks at art objects and curios. Nor is there any need for the opposite sex, or for the willful, desirous other who actively approaches the self; all that is needed is the object-as-fetish for his gaze to uninhibitedly (*suki na dake*) and uni-directionally fondle (*aigan*).[9]

Shimamura's look strokes only the surface of an image that is privileged above a depth or meaning. In the passages from *Snow Country* quoted above, Yoko's face literally floats as if projected over the passing landscape, in its stunningly beautiful, visual transparency. There is no content beneath the projected image; it is nothing but image itself thrown up on the train window-turned-mirror, a "visual effect" that, moreover, suggests that Yoko is no more and no less than a natural landscape to be gazed at (bracketed) with aesthetical disinterest. And, when in the gathering darkness, the landscape fades from the window-mirror, he quickly loses interest. Indeed, one could follow Rey Chow's analysis of fascist aesthetics and dub this a type of "projectional idealism."

Turning the Freudian model of fascism – as projection onto the other of that which we abhor in ourselves – on its head, Chow argues for a literalization of the notion of projection in theorizing fascism, as a throwing forward of an image onto a screen, intrinsically linked to a politics of visuality and the surface. For Chow, the metaphors of light, surface, and image are both positive and positivistic (in the sense of being non-speculative and unrelated to causes or origins), and fascist aesthetics are first and foremost about illumination, the facile, and the spectacle of being seen. This, she argues, is what appeals to the masses, not an unconscious repression of some internalized violence. In other words, we embrace fascism because we love it for its images/representations of the beautiful and the positive, not because of its hidden brutality that speaks to a dark, repressed part of our being. "It is the force of light, transparency, and idealized image that works in the service of 'interpellating' the masses . . . our thoroughly mediatized feelings and perceptions . . . accept this aesthetics without coercion, and . . . accept it as positive and good."[10] In this visual economy, reality follows image. The image *creates* the present – or the material real is adapted to the representation in the image – and the past is reconceptualized, and newly re-produced, in the image of the present.

Obviously, in the mirror-window scene on the train, Kawabata's beautiful images celebrate the "projected surface," while rejecting the depth, meaningfulness, or complexity of modernity proper. The snow country

represents a mythic, lost past whose *image* here appears on the window of the modern train. And in fact, the reflected scene is described as like "a double-exposed film image."[11] But more important to my immediate discussion is the question of what is represented in this projection. The window – conventionally permitting the looking subject to gaze beyond the space he/she occupies – becomes a composite window-mirror that projects the interior space and Yoko, onto the exterior landscape, in effect, transforming the "objective" outside (reality, that is, the Japanese landscape/Yoko) into a subjective, deeply mediated, aestheticized one. That the mirror does not reflect Shimamura back to himself, but acts only as a vehicle for his furtive scopophilic consumption of the Yoko-landscape, suggests a willful elision of self – this misrecognition in this mirror is absolutely a failure of identity. He does not recognize himself anywhere in this representation. There is no, so to speak, ideal self-image imagined in the window. But simultaneously Shimamura is himself "represented," since neither does his look, accurately speaking, recognize Yoko. One might say, Shimamura sees nothing but himself as an other. Looking at the mirror image of pieces of Yoko, Yoko's eye does not return the look. In fact, Shimamura does not here give himself to be seen.[12] The (*literal*) *cutting-off* of Yoko's image from affect and bodily presence, and her head from her body, and her eye from her face, and the projection of these severed body parts onto the landscape suggests that Shimamura's desirous act of looking which seeks to give shape to Yoko's desire, meets and encounters a lack or absence.

One of Lacan's four drives is the scopic drive – one looks, and the look wants to see something. Following Freud, Lacan postulates that there are three logics, or positions to the drive. In terms of the Gaze or the scopic drive, this breaks down to the activities of: I gaze at something, I gaze at myself, I give myself to be gazed at. In the scopic field, as in other fields, the drive itself is split, thus Lacan's theory of the look by the subject severs the eye from the look. "The eye and the gaze – this is for us the split in which the drive is manifested at the level of the scopic field."[13] The eye is the "organ" (fragmented body-part that signifies lack) of the subject who looks and in the look desires to see *something*, but whose look can never coincide/be harmonious or unified with the Gaze (of the barred or lacking Other). Lacan wrote: "Generally speaking, the relation between the gaze and what one wishes to see involves a lure. The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as *objet a*, that is to say, at the level of the lack (—ø)."[14]

Moreover, this lack is simultaneously sutured by these partial objects or what, following Lacan, I am calling "*objet a*." In *Snow Country* (and other Kawabata texts) there is a mapping of these partial objects onto a specifically national, imaginary, and nostalgic landscape. This amounts to a sort of short-circuiting of the aim of desire by fixing it to a nationalized signifier, as I hope to show in this chapter. Because of this particular

sublimation, Kawabata simultaneously engages in an act of adamant avoidance of the Gaze, in the manner in which the term signifies for Lacan.

It is not uncommon for women to stand in for *objet a*, because for Lacan, beyond the social troping of woman as lacking, or the negative to man, this positing of woman as "not existing" is due to a structure within language itself, within the system of language in which we think.[15] When lack is projected onto the woman, male lack may be disavowed through this projection. Hence woman as *objet a* may function as the object of fantasy that allows man to feel complete, to suture over his lack.

> As negative to the man, woman becomes a total object of fantasy (or an object of total fantasy), elevated into the place of the Other and made to stand for its truth . . . The *objet a*, cause of desire and support of male fantasy, gets transposed onto the image of the woman as Other who then acts as its guarantee. The absolute "Otherness" of the woman, therefore, serves to secure for the man his own self-knowledge and truth.[16]

Tied to his images, by which he orders reality according to his fantasy, Shimamura can desire in a surety – both his subjectivity and his *objets a* linked to a fixed acculturation – and hold back the threat of the Real that the Gaze would drag along with it. In this construct, one might claim that Shimamura avoids the Gaze. As *objet a*, Yoko's eye here covers over the Real while it arouses desire. But this is of course simultaneously, potentially the object-cause of anxiety, because in the scopic field the *objet a* carries with it, constitutively, a threat of the Real *qua* the gaze.

One looks desiring to see something. One might venture to ponder: what does Shimamura want to see? Toward the beginning of *Snow Country*, Shimamura recollects his thoughts just prior to his discovery of Yoko in the window-turned-mirror,

> It had been three hours earlier. In his boredom, Shimamura stared at his left hand as the forefinger bent and unbent. Only this hand seemed to have a vital and immediate memory of the woman he was going to see. The more he tried to call up a clear picture of her, the more his memory failed him, the farther she faded away, leaving him with nothing to catch and hold. In the midst of this uncertainty only the one hand, and in particular the forefinger, even now seemed damp from her touch, seemed to be pulling him back to her from afar. Taken with the strangeness of it, he brought the hand to his nose and tried smelling it . . .[17]
>
> (6–7)

Sunk in this sensuous reverie, Shimamura draws a line across the frosted window. It is in this line that Yoko's eye appears, disembodied, floating,

and, according to him, as quoted previously, inexpressibly beautiful. The wish to recall the sexual memory of one woman (Komako) is here replaced by the disembodied (and blinded) eye of another (Yoko). The finger retains a deeply sexualized memory of a woman's wetness, possibly even the memory-traces of a long washed away odor, and the line drawn in the condensation on the window brings eye (Shimamura's), so to speak, eye to eye with Yoko's.

Shimamura's desiring look, as I have already described it, projects pieces of Yoko onto the passing landscape to reorder his perception of reality in accordance with an aestheticized and particularly cultured "Yoko-nature" construct. In the process he erases himself from the representation, never appearing in the window-mirror. This look is thus also simultaneously a radical and willful misrecognition of himself and an attempt to give shape to Yoko's desire (who stands in for Komako temporarily). More concretely, the non-reciprocity of looking here is complicated by the furtive scopophilia with which Shimamura greedily devours the spectacle as desiring effect of the Law, but also as the omnipotent voyeur. He rubs the steam off the rest of the window to widen his view of Yoko-nature.

Here the lived-sensual-erotic memory of physical and emotional intimacy with one woman (Komako) combines with a pure, distanced aesthetical appreciation of the other (Yoko) and the passing landscape (nature *qua* Japanese culture) to bring Shimamura to a moment of subjective epiphany – that is, a sensation of being that is acculturated and aestheticized. In the process, the two women function as object-means to his aesthetic-experiential-ontological ends. But how do the women come to embody this function? What are the, so to speak, representational requirements of the women that elicit Shimamura's "epiphany"?

In the passage just quoted I have, as elsewhere throughout the chapters on Kawabata, borrowed Seidensticker's masterful and perfectly aesthetic translation of Kawabata's prose, with the exception of the final sentence. Seidensticker's translation yields only "he brought the hand to his face" where the original reads literally, "he brought the hand to his nose and tried smelling it." Surely it is easy to imagine why Seidensticker edited as he did. For most readers, the act of smelling a finger becomes stickily physical, rather gross in the context of the sweep of this otherwise exquisitely crafted prose. After all, odor, taste, and touch are the vulgar senses, negatively intrinsic to the Continental in general, and the Kantian in particular, aesthetical project to mediate or tame nature and the body in all its material-concrete-animal manifestations with culture, or second nature.[18] Hence Pierre Bourdieu critiqued Kantian aesthetics as follows:

> What pure taste refuses is indeed the violence to which the popular spectator consents . . . it demands respect, the distance which allows it to keep its distance. It expects the work of art, a finality with no other end than itself, to treat the spectator in accordance with the Kantian

> imperative, that is, as an end, not a means. Thus, Kant's principle of pure taste is nothing other than a refusal, a disgust – a disgust for objects which impose enjoyment and a disgust for the crude, vulgar taste which revels in this imposed enjoyment . . . The object which "insists on being enjoyed," as an image and in reality, in flesh and blood, neutralizes both ethical resistance and aesthetic neutralization; it annihilates the distancing power of representation, the essentially human power of suspending immediate, animal attachment to the sensible and refusing submission to the pure affect, to simple aisthesis.[19]

Kawabata's sensate-eroticism is distinct from high Continental disinterestedness, as the smelling of the finger above suggests, because of the aesthetic *avowal* of the "vulgar" senses. This, I believe, is in turn because for Kawabata the experience of the acculturated-aesthetic is facilitated by a particular deployment of *women's bodies*. Shimamura "was conscious of an emptiness that made him see Komako's life as beautiful, but wasted, even though he himself was the object of her love; and yet the woman's existence, her straining to live, came touching him like naked skin" (*Snow Country*, 128).

Aesthetics, of course, originates as an exploration of the sensate. As Terry Eagleton put it,

> Aesthetics is born as a discourse of the body . . . The distinction which the term "easthetic" initially enforces in the mid-eighteenth century is not one between "art" and "life," but between the material and the immaterial; between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, that which is bound up with our creaturely life as opposed to that which conducts some shadowy existence in the recesses of the mind. It is as though philosophy suddenly wakes up to the fact that there is a dense, swarming territory beyond its own mental enclave which threatens to fall utterly outside its sway. That territory is nothing less than the whole of our sensate life together – the business of affections and aversions, of how the world strikes the body on its sensory surfaces, of that which takes root in the gaze and the guts and all the arises from our most banal, biological insertion into the world . . .[20]

Kawabata appears deeply concerned with aesthetics in this connotation, or the "business of affections and aversions," or the impact of the sensate/senses on the thinking subject. His aesthetics thus diverge from current popular understanding of aesthetics proper and Kantian aesthetics, or a purely artistic judgment bracketed out of all other judgments. For Shimamura, the dampness and odor of the woman that has become memory implanted on his flesh becomes the medium for a type of vital, aesthetical immediacy, or lived experience. This merging of lived culturalist experientialism with mediated sensate eroticism incorporates both so-called high and low senses. Mediated through language or projected onto screen/

mirror and other refractions, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory senses join scopic and auditory ones as intrinsic to the aesthetic and bring the tensions between body and represented body, and nature and culture-as-aesthetics into constant interplay. Although certainly inanimate objects, natural environment and landscape, and even manufactured items may become objects through which the apprehending subject may be elevated to a thoroughly subjective experience of a dialectic of not-being in being, or truth, but for Kawabata, women appear to be the very best medium.

First, it should be reiterated that because the aesthetic begs for a kind of animation of (lived) experience and because the aesthetic is constitutively interlinked with being, living beings provide the apex of access to experiential epiphany. Mishima explained this by claiming that Kawabata's sensualism was the constitutionally impossible attempt to touch life itself.[21] But the question remains: Why is it that women mark this tension most profoundly? And, why is this nationalized aesthetic bound to the sensual and erotic body? To begin to address these questions, a philosophic addendum might help – in thinking about the coterminous twentieth-century rearticulation of an Edo-period eroticized aesthetic of distance (*iki*), sometimes unsatisfactorily translated as "chic" or "stylish."

As Leslie Pincus has argued, the notion of *iki* is employed by the early twentieth-century Japanese philosopher, Kuki Shūzō, in an attempt to designate a sensibility and taste particular to Japan. Like Nishida's Zen, this was part of the general cultural movement away from what was perceived as the excessive Westernization of early Meiji and the attempt to discover and articulate an alternate and "purely Japanese" aesthetics, values, and ethics.[22] The important point here is twofold. First, Kuki's aesthetic of *iki* valorized the (female) courtesan's erotic body as the quintessential symbol of a type of disinterest. Second, this aesthetic was resolutely bound to a national exceptionalism, "Kuki aspired to forge a link between aesthetic taste and a sensate body – a body that, when raised to a higher power, *became a national body equipped to incorporate cultural meaning with the immediacy and directness of sensory appropriation*."[23] Kuki wrote:

> "Taste" (*shumi*) as in preference, begins with the experience of "taste" (*ajiwau*), as in the sense of taste. We literally "acquire a taste" (*aji o oboeru*), and based on that acquisition, we make value judgments. But it is rare that taste is composed purely of the sense of taste proper. The expression "something with taste" (*aji na mono*) evokes not only the sense of taste but also an aroma to be discerned by the sense of smell. It suggests to us the faint traces of a subtle and elusive fragrance. Moreover, the sense of touch often plays a part as well; the feel on one's palate is part of what makes up a taste. The "feel" of something touches the depths of one's soul in a movement that is altogether ineffable. Together, the sense of taste, smell, and touch make up what we call "experience" in its most fundamental sense.[24]

Mirroring Heidegger's pursuit of authentic Being and the so-called "historical mission" of the German *Volk*, Kuki went on to bind *iki* to *kokutai* (national polity). In the end, for Kuki

> emptied of its historical and social specificity, subjected to the logic of organicism, *iki* became the chosen signifier for Japan, gathering into its interpretative folds those moments Kuki deemed most representative of Japanese culture. In this manner, a single word was assigned the task of representing the identity of an inimitable collective subject against the claims of Western universalism. Kuki reenlisted the purposeful passion disavowed by the stylistic requirements of *iki*, this time in the service of national culture. Further, in what may be the most disturbing irony of all, this national passion, initially articulated as a resistance against the hegemonic thrust of Western civilization, would be recruited in defense of Japan's own escalating imperialism in Asia. The exceptionality of spirit that Kuki claimed for Japan in "*Iki*" *no kōzō* would soon serve as a rationale for Japan's domination of Asia and the spilling of Asian blood. These ironies were not, however, exclusive to Japan; rather, they were inscribed in aesthetic modernism . . . Whether in East Asia or Europe, modernism provided a means to "restructure domination as an aesthetic object."[25]

At roughly the same time as Kuki was looking backward toward Edo in refining his empirical-ontological, yet nationalist philosophy of *iki*, Kawabata was turning backwards seeking inspiration for his narrative aesthetics, while moving forward into modern and modernist forms. And he, like Kuki, was claiming this to be a regeneration of a past, lost, purely Japanese aesthetic. Also like Kuki's philosophy of *iki*, Kawabata's narrative aesthetics are never severed from the erotic and the sensate, but became entwined with a nationalized and exceptionalized culturalism. For Kawabata, something similar to *iki* appears to have complicated his rearticulation of Zen (as described in the previous chapter) to produce a complex eroticism that is at once distanced or disinterested, yet also incorporates an experiential-sensual dimension inscribed on female bodies as well as other objects to facilitate a "lived experience" of truth that is particularly, exceptionally, Japanese.

Not surprisingly, for Kawabata the woman in whose body these tensions (between distance/disinterest and the sensate/eroticism) are best intertwined is the virgin. This is where Kawabata's gesture toward the Real becomes evident. This tension is like the one between the real and its acculturated-aestheticization that I have already described in relation to history and nature, but here the desire for the Real hastens and deepens. (I want here to bracket off Kawabata's [in]famous virgin fetish from any sociological or cultural analysis of contemporaneous Japanese sexual mores. Rather, I want to look at it through the purely narrative function of a type

of fetishization that brings the play of tensions between nature and second nature to its ripest experience. And, I want to relate it to the attempt to experience/avoid "disgust" or that moment that might threaten a breakdown of the distance between the vulgar and the cultured or, for Lacan, the constitutively erotic desire for *objet a*.)

Mishima wrote:

> [Kawabata's] eroticism is, more than a disclosure of [his] personal sensualism, the constant contact with the essence of sensualism itself, that is, life [itself], that never leads back to a logical resolution (*kiketsu*), or, more accurately, it is the attempt at such contact. What is erotic about this in the pure sense lies in the mechanism that the object, that is, life, can never be touched. Kawabata liked to write about virgins. As long as they remain virgins they can never be touched [because] at the moment of violation they are no longer virgins. I think he was intrigued by this unique mechanism that lies in [the concept of the] virgin.[26]

Indeed, Kawabata liked to write about virgins, suggested even in the first work of his to win substantial acclaim, "The Izu Dancer," ("Izu no odoriko," 1926) in which the melancholy young protagonist finds solace in a beautiful child-dancer. She is an icon of female purity, and the hero's vaguely erotic desire is reshaped by the impossibility of requital. But a far bolder virgin fetish informs his much later *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, an account of protagonist Eguchi's visits to a unique brothel where elderly, impotent men fondle drugged, unconscious virgin girls.

> There were curtains over the four walls. The door was curtained too, but the edge had been tied back. He locked the door, drew the curtain, and looked down at the girl. She was not pretending. Her breath was that of the deepest sleep. He caught his breath. She was more beautiful than he had expected. And her beauty was not the only surprise. She was young too. She lay on her left side, her face toward him . . . He slipped quietly under [the quilt], afraid that the girl he knew should sleep on might awaken. She seemed to be quite naked. There was no reaction, no hunching of the shoulders or pulling in of the hips, to suggest that she sensed his presence . . . this would not be an ordinary sleep, he knew.[27]

The narrative is made up of exceedingly explicit recounts of Eguchi's trips to this strange brothel, that detail how the sleeping girls look, sound, taste, and smell. Intricate descriptions of their bodies interweave with Eguchi's memories and dreams as he lies/sleeps beside them. The result is an elaborate, sensate-erotic-aesthetic imaginary – an extreme, perverse expansion of the narrative technologies Kawabata brought to his earlier *Sound of the*

Mountain (*Yama no oto*, 1949). Eguchi's desire gathers around the sleeping girls whose various body parts become, one after another, the source-objects of desire. Like Yoko's projected image, it is important to recognize that the virgins – drugged and unconscious – *cannot* return Eguchi's look. Hence, there is no potential look to threaten him with its otherness. There is no "desirous other" in this version of Kawabata's sensate-erotic imaginary, "Eguchi had thought before that girls who did not awaken were ageless freedom for old men. Asleep and unspeaking, they spoke as the old men wished" (39). There is, instead, nothing but material bodies subjected to his imaginary, and his fantasy flows freely, unfettered by any intrusion of reality.

Although Eguchi's fascination with the girls' bodies includes ample attention to descriptions of sexually conventional objects of erotic attention, such as their breasts, other, conventionally non-eroticized parts of their bodies are given no less fascinated and erotic attention. The girls' wrists, fingers, toes, mouths, even teeth, are lavished with equal curiosity, but each body-part is appreciated in a fragmented, detached form.

> The tooth against Eguchi's finger seemed to be very slightly damp with something that clung to the finger. He moved it back and forth in her mouth, feeling the teeth two and three times. On the outside they were for the most part dry, but on the inside they were smooth and damp. To the right they were crooked, a tooth on top of another. He took the crooked pair between his thumb and index finger. He thought of putting his finger behind them, but, though asleep, she clenched her teeth.
>
> (41)

Regarding *Sleeping Beauties* Mishima argued, "Eroticism has not, for Mr. Kawabata, pointed to totality, for eroticism as totality carries within itself humanity. Lust inevitably attaches itself to fragments and quite without subjectivity, the sleeping beauties themselves are fragments of human beings urging lust to its highest intensity."[28] Mishima is correct here: the sleeping women are not human beings. Mishima calls them "fragments." I think of them as partial objects, that is, they stand in place of *objet a*, or source-objects around which desire circulates – much like Yoko's eye in *Snow Country*.

But there is another complexity to Eguchi's desire here, hinging on the very "cause" of desire – that is, interdiction – because prohibition, for Lacan, engenders desire, and desire is always then simultaneously both longing and interdiction.[29] The girls are virgins. The house of prostitution has one cardinal rule: the clients may not penetrate the sleeping virgin prostitutes. The very nature of the arousal stoked by their naked, helpless spectacle of virginity is hence constitutively bound up with the interdiction that is the Law of the house. Desire, transgression, and interdiction join in the body of the virgin and the threat of her sexual violation.

> He would now have revenge upon this slave maiden, drugged into sleep, for all the contempt and derision endured by the old men who frequented the house. He would violate the rule of the house. He knew that he would not be allowed to come again. He hoped to awaken her by his roughness. But immediately he drew back, for he had come upon clear evidence of her virginity.
>
> A virgin prostitute, and at her age!
>
> (42–3)

Had Eguchi penetrated her, one can only surmise that his desire would have fled to find another object.

And there is still more complexity to the equation. Noting that Mishima, like Kobayashi, had called Kawabata's narrative gaze cold,[30] Matsuura, expounding on his earlier suggestion that Kawabata's look rendered the animate and inanimate alike, pondered, "It is said that he looks at people like they were things, but, I doubt that he is really looking at things. Isn't it that Kawabata, after all, does not look at people – in the same way that he does not look at things? Isn't it that actually, he is not looking at anything?"[31] Matsuura points out that throughout Kawabata's corpus there is an avoidance of looking at that which elicits disgust or, ultimately, that which is indexical of the disgust that attends human disfigurement and death. That is, he inverts the conventional interpretation: Kawabata's look seeks a not-seeing. This, finally, is the ultimate twist that renders Kawabata's narrative look so conflicted: the desirous looking that seeks to see and yet to not-see. When the *objet a* turns toward its abjected aspects and away from its Imaginary suturing of lack, it is toward the threat of the Real that the Gaze both veils and reveals. When this "not-seeing" here and there fails the protagonists, the partial objects of their fantasies fail in their suturing of the Real, where *objet a* appears behind the image.

The avoidance identified by Matsuura is what I call Kawabata's displacement of any apprehension of the Real with his own mediated, constructed fantasy. This is also the projection of the *acculturated* subject onto or against the lack inherent in the Gaze. Or, one might call it the inflexible affixing of fantasy to a particular nationalized image, embodied by the Japanese female body. Against the dominant critical focus that Kawabata was interested only in "beauty," Itō Sei, like Matsuura, also accurately described a copresent *avoidance* of not only affect but the unsightly as well, as *integral* to Kawabata's narratives, "Clearly, throughout Kawabata is a sensibility made up of a desperate escape (away) from the polluted."[32] This avoidance, moreover, he goes on to argue, "drags" the reader toward someplace that feels eerie (*bukimi*) – someplace beyond or the next step past "the good and the beautiful."[33] I would like to suggest that this "eerie place beyond the good and the beautiful" is also what I am calling the Real. The Real is, of course, also the site of the abject, the most unsightly of the unsightly. Hence the "avoidance of the unsightly" is intertwined with the

fascistic aestheticization of the real, or real = second nature = Japanese tradition, a construct mobilized actually in part to divert drive and desire away from the Real (at the same time as desire seeks the Real). Or, one could describe this as a tension between a fascistic ethics and the desire of the drive.

Throughout his seminar on ethics, and also in his "Kant avec Sade," Lacan (perversely) offers up Sade as the "truth" of Kantian ethics, because what those ethics disavow is precisely the drive. No man would, held Kant, choose to have sex with the woman he most desired if he understood that the consequence for the fulfillment of his desire was certain death,

> For Kant, it is unimaginable that someone would *want* his own destruction – this would be diabolical. Lacan's answer is not that this is nevertheless imaginable, and that such extreme cases exist, but that there is nothing extreme in it at all. Just as Kant rejects the possibility of pure "holiness" in human beings, so too does he deny the possibility of humans being "diabolically" evil. In fact, for Kant, the truly ethical act and the diabolical act (of evil) share the same structure. An act of pure malice, or what Kant calls "diabolical evil" would require that the actor act contrary to moral law even if it meant acting against his/her own self-interest. This sort of malice must opt to oppose the moral law even if the consequence of doing so is the actor's own death.[34]

Moreover, Kant erred, according to Lacan, by linking the notion of will to the "ideals" of both diabolical evil and the highest good – in both instances, the will must "coincide entirely with the Law, and they are both excluded as cases which cannot apply to human beings."[35] Hence, writes Lacan, "one can easily substitute for Kant's 'Thou shalt' the Sadean fantasm of *jouissance* elevated to the level of an imperative."[36]

Sade is, of course, not Lacan's example of the exemplar of his ethics – Antigone is. Following Copjec, this is in large part because the pervert (here, Sade) does not transcend the law in his *jouissance*, but becomes purely an instrument of that law, "the pervert is a pure, pathos-less instrument of the Other's will . . . this will is experienced by the pervert as a command to subject the Other to torture . . . The purpose of this association is the humiliation or debauchery of the law – not, however, in order to unseat this fallible law, to transgress it and replace it with one's own autonomous law, but in order better to revere it."[37] Sade's ideal of sexual *jouissance* is, unlike the act of Antigone, *not sublimated*.[38] As Copjec explains, sublimation must be understood *not* as an act that separates thought from sex,

> but rather from the supposed subject of knowledge, that is, from the Other. For, the satisfaction of the drive by sublimation testifies to the autonomy of the subject, her independence from the Other . . . But if the *inhibition of the drive* by the achieved aim of its satisfaction bears witness to our independence, the *inhibition of the obsessional's hand*,

> and of Creon's fixation on the law of the State, betray a dependence of jouissance on a supposed subject of knowledge. [Creon is driven by his superego.] This does not mean that enjoyment becomes proscribed, that pleasure is forbidden by the Other, but that jouissance is now prescribed: "Henceforth you will find your enjoyment in the following way!"[39]

One could replace "Creon" here with "Shimamura." Or, to rephrase, Shimamura's desire for the Real is diverted by revulsion (in reaction to the abject) and in place of the *jouissance* that might attend the attempted embrace of the Real behind the *objet a*, there is a deflection of that drive by the superego into a projectional mediation, a *prescribed jouissance* in the form of a nationalized and acculturated aesthetics that harmonizes with the beautiful ideals mobilized in Japanese fascist ideology.[40]

I have already noted Shimamura's inability to cathect. His relentless indifference, which is both produced by and produces his aestheticizations, protects him from the swell of nature that is repeatedly suggested in Komako's burning hot flesh and drunken exhortations. Lying at night beside a dead-drunk Komako, Shimamura's head against her burning hot skin, he "closed his eyes and the warmth sank into his head, bringing an immediate sense of life. Reality came through the violent breathing, and with it a sort of nostalgic remorse" (123). Woman *is* the encroaching potential for disgust and abhorrence, hence the perfect *objet a* that, through the benefit of the mediations, refractions, projections, and transformations of second nature, embodies the tensions that elicit the desirous/repulsed look of seeing/avoiding. "When he was far away, he thought incessantly of Komako, but now that he was near her, this sighing for the human skin took on a dreamy quality like the spell of the mountains. Perhaps he felt a certain security, perhaps he was at the moment too intimate, too familiar with her body. She had stayed with him the night before" (112). This dual fascination and abhorrence is made overt when protagonist Kikuji first sees, then obsessively remembers, over and over, the "grotesque" birthmark that mars Kurimoto Chikako's breast in *Thousand Cranes*.

> Had be been eight, perhaps, or nine? He had been taken by his father to visit Chikako, and they had found her in the breakfast room. Her kimono was open. She was cutting the hair on her birthmark with a small pair of scissors. It covered half the left breast and ran down into the hollow between the breasts, as large as the palm of one's hand. Hair seemed to be growing on the purple-black mark, and Chikako was in process of cutting it.
>
> (10)

> On the newspaper at her knee, Kikuji had seen hairs like whiskers.
>
> (11)

> Kikuji never forgot the mark.
>
> (14)

Or later, when Kikuji examines a tea bowl that might have been stained with lipstick once worn by the now deceased Mrs Ota, "The color of faded lipstick, the color of a wilted red rose, the color of old, dry blood – Kikuji began to feel queasy. A nauseating sense of uncleanness and an overpowering fascination came simultaneously" (104).

Like Kikuji, Kawabata, who has not neglected to lovingly describe grotesqueries of feminized abjection, appears both repulsed by and drawn to, even fascinated with, those indexes of the revolting – or with the abjected aspects of nature itself and not just second nature. "One can discern the axis that underpins Kawabata's narratives, I think, in [their] slight darkness. This axis is, crudely [*sono mama*] linked to a 'dirty beautifulness' and to eroticism. This slight darkness engendered a gaze so direct that it is innately cruel," mused Tachihara.[41] In the last pages of *Sleeping Beauties* Eguchi is put together with two drugged girls. One is pure, fair, and beautiful. The other is described as a dark, oily girl; she sweats, her body and breath exude unpleasant odor, she is tough and wild, he imagines.

> She seemed to be lying with her legs spread wide. She lay face up, her arms flung out. The nipples were large and had a purplish cast. It was not a beautiful color in the light from the crimson velvet curtains. Nor could the skin of the neck and breasts be called beautiful. She had a dark glow. There seemed to be a faint odor at the armpits. "Life itself," muttered Eguchi.
>
> (86)

> The oily skin of the dark girl was unpleasant behind him. It was cold and slippery.
>
> (96)

She cannot be Japanese, he surmises. After passing much of the night alternately touching the two girls and lapsing into one troubled memory-dream state after another, Eguchi awakens to discover that the dark girl lies dead beside him.[42] There is nothing beautiful, or erotic in her death. "Old Eguchi awoke with a groan. He shook his head, but he was still in a daze. He was facing the dark girl. Her body was cold. He started up. She was not breathing. He felt her breast. There was no pulse. He leaped up. He staggered and fell. Trembling violently, he went into the next room" (97).

Too close to nature itself, or in Lacanian terms, too close to *objet a* itself, the *non-Japanese* girl has by her excessive bodily materiality and its surplus to Japanese cultural exceptionalism, been compelled to a non-aestheticized death. In this text the aestheticization-acculturation "protective shield" (or the form Shimamura's sublimation takes) fails. Disgust threatens to rip open the fabric of disinterestedness. The tension between nature and second nature has tipped toward "nature" and what leaks through when Eguchi's

desire is overcome by reality is actually the Real – in the form of death itself. That is, once material reality intrudes upon the refracted "as it ought to be mythic Japanized real," the Real becomes terrifyingly manifest. The "foreign" oily girl's terrifying and revolting death makes a vibrant contrast with that of Yoko, the perfectly aesthetic and thoroughly Japanese beauty of *Snow Country*.

Yoko's death in a burning warehouse is conversely the stunning vehicle for oneness with the "universal." Hastening toward the fire, both Shimamura and Komako are distracted by the skies above,

> The Milky Way. Shimamura too looked up, and he felt himself floating into the Milky Way. Its radiance was so near that it seemed to take him up into it. *Was this the bright vastness the poet Bashō saw when he wrote of the Milky Way arched over a stormy sea?* The Milky Way came down just over there, to wrap the night earth in its naked embrace. There was a terrible voluptuousness about it. Shimamura fancied that his own small shadow was being cast up against it from the earth. Each individual star stood apart from the rest, and even the particles of silver dust in the luminous clouds could be picked out, so clear was the night. The limitless depth of the Milky Way pulled his gaze up into it.
>
> (165, emphasis added)

On his way to witness Yoko's apparent death, the limitless depth of the Milky Way literally "sucks up" Shimamura's gaze (*shisen o suikonde itta*).[43] Shimamura begins to disintegrate into a vast nature. "And the Milky Way, like a great aurora, flowed through his body to stand at the edges of the earth. There was a quiet, chilly loneliness in it, and a sort of voluptuous astonishment" (168). At the warehouse Shimamura watches Yoko's white body fall from the second floor balcony of the dark, vertical warehouse, descending in a perfectly horizontal, physically impossible position as white water flies up from hoses to meet the red flames. This balcony being "low for a second floor, the body could have taken but a fraction of a second to reach the ground; but the eyes had somehow been able to trace its passage in detail" (172). The cold white snow offsets the hot red flames in the framing darkness of the night; the body makes no sound, and raises no dust upon impact. "The body was quite horizontal as it passed through the air. Shimamura started back – not from fear, however. He saw the figure as a phantasm from an unreal world. That stiff figure, flung out into the air, became soft and pliant. With a doll-like passiveness, and the freedom of the lifeless, it seemed to hold both life and death in abeyance" (173). Shimamura feels a "flicker of uneasiness" at the thought that her head might drop or knee bend, and so "disturb that perfectly horizontal line" (173). Realizing it is Yoko, Komako screams. Shimamura sees not lifelessness, but metamorphosis in her body, the beautiful shut eyes, arched throat, and white face over which flames flicker. As Komako carries Yoko's body away, the

last line of the text reads, "the Milky Way flowed down inside him [Shimamura] with a roar" (175).

Matthew Mizenko has interpreted these final pages of *Snow Country* as follows:

> In contrast to the unity of nature and the other that Shimamura has so far felt when looking in the mirror, because this time it is he himself who merges with nature, for the first time the distinction between subject and object is dispelled, and Shimamura is able to personally experience the epiphany of the aesthetical moment.[44]

Notably, it is not the women (Komako or Yoko) with whom Shimamura merges to "overcome" the subject/object distinction, but the individual-as-subject that is obliterated in merging with the universal (nature). As a matter of fact, his dissolution into the universal is fiercely disinterested in the other.

In Japan, there is a legend about the Milky Way (the Tanabata legend). Two of the stars that flank the constellation were human lovers so impassioned that they were turned into stars. The ecstasy-tragedy is that, inhabiting opposite sides of the Milky Way, they meet only once a year. It is as though the moment of Yoko's death, with its perfect sensory-perceptual contrasts (such as the red fire against the white snow), is Kawabata's "human" version of the ecstatic condition of separation in the skies above. The motif of the Milky Way that carries through these final passages is introduced as an experience related by the canonized, revered, medieval poet, Matsuo Bashō (1644–94). Great, universal nature – the heavens themselves – flow down into Shimamura, in much the same way that Bashō experienced the stars. The coming together of human and nature is culturalized, particularized, dehistoricized, and requires the ultimate disinterestedness of an aestheticized (Japanese) female corpse.

The woman-as-artwork is therefore not an aesthetical formation with no other ends but its own (like the successfully bracketed aesthetic object in Kant); rather, she is a means to the experience of *lived being* that I have already described. Marked by her own body-ness and its potential to arouse violence, distaste, and even disgust when rendered impure and unclean, the woman as vessel of sensate-eroticism plays intensely and intimately on the tensions between "nature" and "second nature." (The woman-as-artwork calls forth the dying, the decaying, the rotting, the too-physical cloying-ness – all linked to women's bodies – and simultaneously distances this physical-immediacy with cultured and nationalized mediations.)[45] The drive toward the Real (the death drive) is diverted into a disinterested desire for an aestheticized real-as-cultured-nature best personified in the body of the *Japanese* woman. Although the fragmentation of the woman *qua objet a* binds her to the Real/death, Kawabata's protagonists *do not* experience diffusion in the body of the woman. Instead, his partial objects suture the

abyss of the Real. Successfully aestheticized in *Snow Country* (looked at disinterestedly), Yoko's death facilitates Shimamura's communal, nationalized, homosocial, spiritual diffusion. Unsuccessfully aestheticized, the oily, non-Japanese girl of *Sleeping Beauties* functions as the repository for Eguchi's objects of abjection.

The aesthetical annihilation of the other (as in Yoko's death) is easily understood as a fascist aesthetic. The other side of this configuration, or the diffusion of the self into a fiercely mediated reality, can also be a fascist aesthetic when at its foundation it requires a reconfiguration of the Real into this same (nationalized) "reality." That is, when the Real is reconfigured into a culturally particularized and communal "reality *qua* second nature" in which reality is relentlessly mediated with a mythicized "Japanese convention" and historical and individual differences are disavowed. The desire of the Other is willfully codified and shaped in an attempt to gesture toward originary desire, yet avoid the abjection constitutively intertwined with that gesture. This is once again where Lévinas calls for invocation: it is an integration of self and other that obliterates the otherness of the other. On a social-discursive level, this appears as the denial of history and an elevation of myth, the mediation (to a degree that it equals annihilation) of "real things" (especially the representation of women) with aesthetics and an imaginary Japaneseness. On an interpersonal level, it is the sublation of the other and the self, but in the image of the nationalized-aestheticized subject. It is this process – the specific manner in which mediation of reality is obsessively attempted (and the *form* that sublimation of the death drive takes to divert it from the Real to the *objet a*) through all the aesthetical-acculturated devices (the culturally exceptional aetheticization of ontology) I have described – that I understand to be collusive with fascist aesthetics.

Part II

The politics of climate and community in *Woman in the Dunes* and "The idea of the desert"

The screenplay *Woman in the Dunes* was based on the 1962 book by the same title, both written by Abe Kōbō (1924–93). The film, like the book, has overwhelmingly been read in the West, as well as in Japan, as an existential, and thus universalist (transhistorical) inquiry. Released in 1964, winner of the Cannes Film Festival jury prize, directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi (1927–2001) – the first Japanese director nominated for an Academy Award – the film also received accolades for its stunning cinematography and eroticism. The film narrative faithfully follows the book to tell the story of a middle-aged, amateur, Japanese entomologist, Niki Junpei (which suggests something like "Everyman," played by Okada Eiji),[1] who leaves Tokyo for a three-day research trip to rural oceanside sand dunes in search of a new beetle. Seeking shelter at the home of a woman (unnamed; played by Kishida Kyōko) who lives in a surreal village comprised of houses built in deep pits in the sand dunes, Niki is imprisoned there by the villagers. Confronted by the absurdity of the woman's life, which is dominated by the arduous task of shoveling sand (that if allowed to pile up would bury the house) for collection and profit by the village collective and the mystifying fact that in the dunes physical matter takes on scientifically irrational properties (such as sand being moist, rather than dry), Niki first dedicates himself to escape. Eventually immersed in a project he entitles "hope" (begun to free himself from dependence on the villagers) that unexpectedly collects condensed water from the sand and erotically involved with the woman, Niki "discovers" meaning in the hitherto meaningless life in the dunes. Although given the opportunity to escape, he chooses to remain there instead.

Given the dominant interpretation of the film/book as existential, criticism tends to focus on the meaningfulness of the relation between self and other, specifically, that between Niki and the woman and Niki and the village collective. Undoubtedly, the book and the film explore subjectivity as

a problematic, the individual quest to find meaning in life, and the ethics of how that individual structures his relationship to the other. In the secondary sources on the cinematic and literary texts, these themes, however, are framed almost exclusively within Western existentialism as theorized by Jean-Paul Sartre (and generally divested of existentialism's political aspects).[2] The following comment by David Desser is typical of the sort of commentary that dominates discussions of the text(s):

> It is worth noting that Abe Kobo, despite some au courant thematic elements, as a novelist has perhaps more affinities with the West than with his Japanese contemporaries . . . The ending [of *Woman in the Dunes*], in which the hero decides to stay in the sand dune with the woman, was clearly an existential parable, a Sartrean variation on "No Exit."[3]

As I stated in my introduction, I will not here argue that these transcendentalist interpretations are incorrect (the film and the book certainly are "about" these trans-historical concerns). However, such readings must, of course, bracket the film (and/or the book) outside its historical context. The intentions for doing so may indeed differ, ranging from philosophic-aesthetical to universalist-humanist. Against this dominant insistence on interpreting the film and book in such a purified context, I want, to the contrary, to adamantly unbracket the film and reinterpret it as a comment particular to coterminous Japanese ideology and community.[4] I also want to call attention to a critique of capitalism – symbolized by the sand – that existentialist interpretations tend to obscure. Abe was, as I have already noted, after all, a communist.

I do not mean to deny that the film dialogues with so-called Western-originated intellectual discourses and those discourses' representative thinkers, such as Marxism and Karl Marx or existentialism and Jean-Paul Sartre. But when I discuss Marxism or existentialism in the film, I will do so in the context of *Japanese* postwar intellectual debates on modernization, capitalism, subjectivity, and relation to the other. Because in the postwar, Japanese Marxists focused more critical attention on the "problematic" of the individual, or subject, and less on class issues, this must be taken into account in interpreting the form a Marxist critique might take in the film.

In order to contextualize the film, I try to provide sufficient information on the political-literary-ideological debates on subjectivity and community, including a resurgence of Japanism and nativism, that engaged many of Abe and Teshigahara's peers. In so doing, I hope to clarify an epistemic context from which the ethics of the aesthetics of *Woman in the Dunes* emerged and signified, as well as show how this context affected the manner in which Abe-Teshigahara portrayed their existential parable.

Abe was a controversial and important figure in Japanese literary circles, hailing from the Japanese colony of Manchuria (although he was born in Japan he spent his early childhood in Manchuria). During high school and

college Abe traveled back and forth to Japan, settling there permanently after the Second World War. Abe had little regard for the emperor and the recently halted Japanese fascist-ethnicist, imperialist quest. This is not to say he was pro-American.[5] Staunchly anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist, he joined the Japanese Communist Party where he remained active until 1962, completing *Woman in the Dunes* the same year, shortly thereafter adapting it for the screenplay. Thus I begin by "particularizing" the film as, first and foremost, a *communist-inspired* critique of a quite specific Japanese capitalist social community, ethics, and values. This critical move is not entirely unprecedented; for example, in 1997 Koizumi Kōichirō wrote about the book as follows:

> I want to underscore precisely why it is possible to link *Woman in the Dunes* with the contemporaneous circumstances following the collapse of Marxism [in Japan in the early to mid-1960s], and [consider the issue of] the underlying significance of the image of the shifting sand in *Woman in the Dunes* as something that has concealed that contemporary possibility.
>
> To put it bluntly, it [the image of the sand] is nothing other than the revised revelation (*saihakken*) and orientation that [now] recognized the capitalist reality (*shihonteki genjitsu ninshiki*) and saw what was really going on in the world (*sekai ninshiki no acuchuariti*) and that replaced the socialist or Marxist grasp of reality that had dominated and guided (*ryōdō*) [the immediate] "postwar."[6]

Although I interpret the sand quite differently than does Koizumi, my impetus is similar to his – that is, to read the film in its *sociopolitical* context. In so doing, against the critical tendency to herald the shift in Abe marked by *Woman in the Dunes* from "dogma-driven communist" to "individualist" I will argue that *Woman in the Dunes* is a much darker gesture.[7] It is a critique of the concurrent re-emergence of a positivistic, nationalistic, ethnocentric, community-as-tradition intellectual trend in Japan, even within the weakening Communist Party, advocating a resurrection of the ideals of the old, rural, village cooperative system, or *kyōdōtai*. In the film, this cooperative is subordinated to the needs of corrupt capitalists and capital itself. Throughout I am also attentive to the meaning of labor in relation to production that, given its importance in Marxist ideology (and thus, logically to Abe) and in the film, where representations of labor frequently dominate the footage, has been undertheorized.

Hence, I also challenge the convention of viewing the filmic resolution as "positive." For example, Keiko McDonald wrote, "Abe suggests that love between a man and a woman has the potential to create a better world, in that it mitigates man's alienation."[8] I prefer to regard the resolution as highly ironic. While there is undoubtedly a transformation in Niki, I read the transformation as the successful indoctrination/interpellation of Niki

into a community that is fascistic in its relation to the other (although not fascist), exploitative, and "traditionally Japanese." Taken together, the separate chapters of this section argue that *Woman in the Dunes* is a deeply critical allegorical exploration of the relation not only between individuals (Niki and the woman and the collective), but between community-of-the-same (the village in the dunes) and the other (outsider to the community) in the context of Japanese postwar capitalism.

Because my study focuses on the film rather than the book, I will also situate the film in a *cinematic* context, as well as read it cinematically. Although the film is deeply faithful to the book, there are a number of shifts in focus in the film version, some likely simply due to the different mediums (in the sense that film, of course, must condense more information, and replace description with image). Kanesaka Kenji lamented the manner in which the film diverges from the book,

> It appears that [Teshigahara's] only ethic (logic) is to be faithful to the original text. But I think that actually the result was that [the film] became completely unfaithful to the spirit of the original text. Anyway, the film doesn't show us very compelling images equivalent to the surrealism of Abe's world. Captured by the camera, photogenic objects such as grains of sand stuck to the woman's skin, or the flows of sand don't achieve the grotesque poetics of Abe's literature.[9]

Conversely, Okuno Takeo praised this independence of film from book: "This is not a cinematicization of the narrative *Woman in the Dunes*. It is a filmic representation independent from Abe's personal image as represented in the book."[10] Although the following could be said about most films, it is important to remember that *Woman in the Dunes* is not the creation of a single writer or director-as-auteur. Rather, it takes its form as a joint project, or creative collaboration between Teshigahara and Abe, and through the contributions of cinematographer Segawa and other members of the film crew. Therefore I generally ignore the book in the elaboration of my discussion of the film.[11] Abe may even have intended the book and the film to be ontologically universalist, but ultimately I hope to show that the film is an ontological allegory deeply particularized by contemporaneous Japanese circumstances.

Anyway, whether one applauds or deplores the film's departure from the original book, it is generally agreed that there are some important distinctions between the two. On the one hand, an aesthetic of disinterestedness dominates much of Teshigahara's filmic syntax and style. This disinterestedness sometimes takes on a *politicized aspect* in *Woman in the Dunes* and functions in the Brechtian sense to rupture viewer identification with characters as individuals, and instead guides the spectators toward reading the social and political determinants of the represented circumstances. That is, it represents a gesture of unbracketing the aesthetic.

On the other hand, it is important to also remember that the film was undoubtedly intended to be beautiful, and indeed is, "Segawa Hiroshi's shots of the sand are beautiful."[12] *Woman in the Dunes* was an independent, joint production of Teshigahara Productions and the Japanese Art Theater Guild, a group of young filmmakers involved in an attempt to create political-aesthetical films in opposition to the dominant studio productions of the 1960s, that they viewed as commercial, inartistic, and uninteresting.[13] Teshigahara's father was a revered *ikebana* (flower arrangement, one of the conventional Japanese aesthetic arts) master, founder of the Sogetsu-style school. Later in life Teshigahara followed in his father's footsteps. Studying painting at university, Teshigahara apparently dabbled in documentary first, then turned to narrative film.[14] It is easy to imagine that, alongside cinematographer Segawa's skill, he brought a sense of design, balance, and other visual aesthetics to the film. Aesthetics in the film appears at times to function "for itself" – that is, as beauty for beauty's sake, complicating the other, political and philosophic dimensions of the aesthetics of the film. This tension complicates any unitary interpretation.

The film is also famed for its eroticism. Accordingly, my final chapter shifts the focus from the relation to the other in terms of communal identity, to an analysis of the gendered and individual erotic relation between Niki and the woman or to the ethics of desire and the drive. The film was shot and released during an erotic film "boom." From the mid-1960s onward in Japan, not only pornography, "pink films" (soft-core pornographic movies) and *Nikkatsu roman poruno* (Nikkatsu romantic-pornography), but mainstream cinema as well, made male domination of women the virtual idiom of Japanese cinematic eroticism. Released in 1964, *Woman in the Dunes* includes many of these developing technologies of erotic gazing: female nudity as spectacle, a bound and gagged woman, and a rape of a woman. However, through a careful formal analysis of the film syntax, I will show how, unlike the contemporaneous erotic (*nikutai*) Japanese films, which often depended upon the abuse of women for spectator titillation, the manner in which these eroticized codes were manipulated in *Woman in the Dunes* actually de-eroticizes them. Hence, I will argue that the developing codes of cinematic eroticism dependent on the domination of women were *cited in order to be subverted*, and thus constitute a filmic commentary on the gendered (or sexed) relation to the other. I will ultimately argue that the film's eroticism relies on a decentralized ("feminine") sexual economy that also resolutely eroticizes the male body, offering an alternative erotic idiom.

I find that the film struggles with the same tension that informs my book throughout: the tension between the ethics of relation to the other and the ethics of perseverance towards the truth of desire. However, rather than showing a purely positive resolution to this ethical dilemma, the film ultimately explores the problematic of, without itself succumbing to, a capitulation to what Badiou has called "fidelity to the simulacrum" or the deflection of universal truth into particularism.

5 A preface to *Woman in the Dunes*

Space, geopolitics, and "The idea of the desert"

This chapter functions in large part as a preface to my discussion in the following chapters of the film *Woman in the Dunes.* I focus on an essay written by Abe in 1958, "Sabaku no shisō" ("The idea of the desert"), and what I regard as the elision of the essay's historical particularity in a 1997 commentary by Kuritsubo Yoshiki, "Abe Kōbō: 'Sabaku no shisō' – sono rinri to sekaisei ni tsuite" ("Abe Kōbō: On the ethics and worldliness in 'The idea of the desert'").[1] "The idea of the desert" clearly articulates some of Abe's thoughts about the metaphoric and political significance of the desert and critiques the use of the desert in various films. Not only do the comments made by Abe in the essay shed light on what he intended the desert to signify, his critique of other films using the desert as location suggests an attitude toward subjectivity (or being), colonial politics, and ethical relation to the other that I find useful in analyzing *Woman in the Dunes.* Kuritsubo's commentary is as near to perfect an example as imaginable of how what I have already identified as the overwhelming tendency to interpret Abe's texts (filmic or literary) as thoroughly "universal" relies on an elision of (*even clearly articulated*) political particularity. (This is not to deny the relative independence with which texts signify regardless of the putative intentions of their authors, but to highlight how a specific reading serving a dominant way of interpreting can be engineered in spite of much evidence to the contrary.) I do not position "The idea of the desert" as an authenticating or authorizing text by which I validate my interpretation of the film, rather the pairing of Abe's essay with Kuritsubo's temporarily "stands in" for the similar move that I will argue attends the film and its reception. In addition, a set of critical concerns established in this chapter – on subjectivity, war responsibility, relation to the other, community, geopolitics, and so forth – will continue to inform my analysis in the subsequent chapters.

Abe wrote *Woman in the Dunes* and "The idea of the desert" at a time when modern Japanese philosophic and literary discourses variously prioritized or focused on a logic of space in relation to ideologies on being. With the ever-increasing geographic shifts to urban centers, most specifically to Tokyo, and away from rural origins, arose a tendency to view being

as connected to (specific) geophysical place. This was predated by the prewar revival of Shintoism and nostalgia for the *furusato*. The *furusato* is the geophysical place of one's family's origins and the location of ancestral graves, thus the "spiritual home" to which one returns if only to be buried. The revival of Shintoism carried with it the spatialization of deities (they inhabit places and locations or things in certain places). This is, of course, on a very concrete level repeated in the necessity even today of carrying the ashes of a deceased family member back to the "originary" home where the ancestral graves are. However, the conceit of space in relation to subjectivity is also important to the modern inquiry into philosophic-intellectual notions of being, albeit metaphorically, in the terminology employed by the eminent Kyoto school philosopher Nishida Kitarō who explained consciousness in spatialized terms. Both before and after the Second World War, he designated the various levels of consciousness *basho* – that is, literally "place." Feenberg writes that Nishida's philosophy "focused on the objectivity of the acting subject, its essential situatedness in a 'place' (*basho*) out of which it must act and in which it is acted on and shaped."[2]

Nishida's use of the word "*basho*/place" designated a psychic positioning of a material, living being in the universe, and *not* actual physical-material location. The logic of place, however, is literalized in philosopher Watsuji Tetsurō's (1889–1960) 1935 *Fūdo* (*Climate and Culture*; the two characters for wind and earth).[3] *Fūdo* attempts an analysis of national-ethnic character as arising out of, and in relation to, features of the land and climate in which the peoples live.[4] In opposition to the Kantian dual empirical/transcendental structure of subjectivity, which Watsuji felt gave inordinate primacy to temporality, Watsuji postulated a primacy of *spatiality* in subjectivity, related to (the natural, geophysical) topography and climate. The idea that Japanese sensibility and culture is "naturally" bound to the topography and climate of Japan has become a commonplace axiom appended to ideologies of Japanese exceptionalism. There is no need here to go into detail about Watsuji's specific, essentialist interpretation of the relationship between environment, culture, and national character. Suffice to say, *Fūdo* causally links various national-ethnic temperaments of communities of people (such as China, Japan, and India) and the types of cultures and societies that these communities produce (broken into the modern nation-state divisions), to these bounded environments.[5] In the 1960s Watsuji enjoyed a revival, and this book, alongside his *Koji junrei* (*Pilgrimages to Ancient Temples*, 1919), also a text focused on place and culture, is still widely available as a cheap paperback, unlike his work on ethics or subjectivity proper. Naoki Sakai wrote that *Fūdo*

> has been upheld as one of the key works in the field of Japanese cultural history. Since its initial serial publication in the academic journal *Shisō* between 1928 and 1934, it has enjoyed an astonishingly wide popularity among Japanese readers. In many respects, *Climate and*

> *Culture* has been read and interpreted as a canonical work that has played a decisive role in the development of Japanese cultural history both as an academic discipline and as a genre of popular writing often referred to as *nihonjin-ron*, or the discourse on Japanese uniqueness.[6]

The resurgent popularity of *Fūdo* suggests that in the postwar as well, the concept that geophysical environment may impact powerfully on the temperament and culture of individuals as members of specific nations or communities was intriguing for many Japanese, both intellectuals and not. Might this ideology have nuanced Abe's conceptualization of environment, nationality, and more specifically, the desert, and the behavior of those living in desert communities?

Deserts, or desert-like landscapes, have always somehow enticed him, confesses Abe, in his "The idea of the desert." He writes, "it goes without saying that this fascination (*akogare*) is intensified by the fact that there are none in Japan" (53). Accordingly, here I ask: What is the relationship of the environment in general and the desert in particular, to Abe's notions of subjectivity, geopolitics, and relation to the other, as discussed in "The idea of the desert"?

Abe's essay begins with warm, fuzzy, ambivalent memories of his childhood spent in the semi-desert plains of Manchuria, in which sudden, short, seasonal sand storms brought clouds of dust announcing the onset of spring. He follows this with a sort of romantic musing on the plasticity of the desert, in which he makes reference to children's abandon to the molding of private universes in sandboxes "forgetting time and remaking the world," as Kuritsubo well describes. Kuritsubo makes much of these opening passages, quoting frequently, and noting that Abe adds that, however, any and all subjective (private, or personal; *shukanteki*) impulses are traced with social and historical causalities.[7] Abe continues, "the desert suggests 'frontier,'" moreover, "there is no government in the sand-box. Even if there is, at the most, it is something on the level of a town council or dealing with some member of the ward assembly" (22).

What surprised me was that Kuritsubo sums up the rest of the essay (in which Abe makes his truly salient points) by simply noting that Abe goes on to discuss the portrayal of the desert in the 1957 French film, *Oeil pour Oeil*.[8] Kuritsubo then shifts to other sources to build on his primary (universalist and existentialist) point, interpreting comments made by Abe in an interview as follows: "it is obvious that when Abe employed the words 'destruction' and 'construction,' 'ruin and regeneration' he was thinking in terms of something infinitely 'universal'."[9] Kuritsubo postulates that although Abe found William [*sic*] Said's *Orientalism* "interesting," he questioned its relevance to Japan and must have, in the end, disagreed since Abe was a true internationalist, believing like Ōe Kenzaburō in "world citizenship" and in doing away with nationality.[10] Hard to believe from Kuritsubo's characterization, actually, is what Abe goes on to argue in "The

idea of the desert": the *absolute and very geo-specific, political nature of the desert in relationship to modern imperialism and colonization*. Pointedly, the very next sentence after the last one quoted by Kuritsubo (on the absence of government in the sandbox) reads: "However, all of the ghosts of international politics float together above the frontier . . . the import of the South American desert and those of Asia and Africa are completely different. The [North] American desert was not only the stage for 'horse operas' but also the stage for the world's largest nuclear power factories." (55). Kuritsubo's universalist interpretation of "The idea of the desert" equates the sand-box with the desert-as-frontier and can only be possible by *ignoring* what Abe has to say about geopolitics in the essay.

"The idea of the desert" proceeds to a critique of various filmic portrayals of deserts. Although he praises some aspects of American cowboy movies that use desert locations, Abe rejects these as optimal uses of the desert because "the Indians [*sic*] were defeated" (56), drawing the reader's attention away from the universal to the specifics of a system of imperialist domination, colonization, and genocide. Tersely dismissing as thoroughly beside the point Disney and other nature documentaries that try to reconceive the barren desert as teeming with life, Abe spends the better remainder of the essay describing "Oeil pour Oeil" as the best film he has seen using the desert as location and as index. (Although Abe's praise of the film is not completely untempered.)[11]

It is the story, writes Abe, of a French doctor, Dr Walter, working in a town near Beirut in the Middle East and a Lebanese Arab named Bortak who stalks him. Bortak's wife has died, a result of discriminatory health care of native Arabs, although not through any individual or personal act by or fault of Dr Walter. Nonetheless Bortak sets out to get vengeance on Walter – who is only *symbolic* of his oppression.[12] The source of Bortak's rage is not just his wife's death, but the institutional inequity of colonization. Citing Lenin on the rage of the Russian serf at his lord, which is a rage personally irrational, but politically rational (61–2), Abe shifts his discussion back and forth between the specifics of the film and the general politics of colonization, race, and global domination by Western Europe and North America. He then addresses the history of French colonialism (mentioning, specifically, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, Algeria). The final scene of the film, in which the Lebanese Bortak and the French Walter are completely isolated in the desert, wins Abe's highest praise. It is not that the power-domination relations are simply inverted; rather, they become fluid. Personal impulses are thoroughly imbued with the geopolitical. In the "plastic" desert, colonizer Walter follows native Bortak, who is now supposed to be, ironically, guiding him back to civilization. Bortak, however, keeps changing his story, telling Walter at one moment that Damascus is in one direction, only later to claim it is in the opposite one. Tricked by Bortak, the two walk endlessly to their mutual death (an act of vengeance that in its fulfillment will also be his own suicide). During these sequences power relations shift with the

moment. In one instance, Walter appears dominant and powerful, in another, it is Bortak who seems stronger. The final scene has the collapsed, wounded Bortak assuring Walter that he is finally telling the truth that Damascus is "just over there," and begging the doctor to send help for him upon arrival. The camera shows the spectator what the doctor, now walking on alone, cannot see: "just over there" is no Damascus, but yet another endless stretch of sand. The film and Abe's reading of it certainly evokes Hegel's Master–Slave parable, not only in the postulation of a situation that turns the tables on the colonist–colonizer relationship, placing the native in control, but even more in the suggestion that individual subjectivity is socially dependent on the other or, in more Lacanian terms, the manner in which the subject takes its place in and through the other. Yet subjectivity is never severed from its geopolitical specificity.

Stating that he felt the need to analyze his own attraction to the desert, Abe muses which character in a sense "stands in" for himself. "Of course, I belong to a colored race. In that sense, I occupy Bortak's position" (66). This, reports Abe, is why he enjoyed watching Bortak's cruel vengeance on the personally blameless Walter. However, he insists, it is not so simply explained. The following is a long, but I think worthy, quote from the essay.

> In comparison with white people, I guess we Japanese definitely are in Bortak's position. But in truth we had the role of Walter to our fellow (*nakama*) Asians. Perhaps, unexpectedly, in our attachment to the desert we still underestimate it. I think this is the same problem of the slackness in our quest to deal with responsibility for the war . . . To watch this movie and identify with Bortak is surprisingly then a self-deception.
>
> Have we [Japanese] made, for example, a single movie that depicts a Japanese meeting a similar fate to Walter in the rocky mountains of Korea or the dessert plains of old Manchuria? . . . Moreover, even if such a movie were made, would Japanese viewers watch it with pleasure? I don't believe so. Quite to the contrary, I'm sure they would just get angry. Perhaps the level of Japanese people's consciousness is such that they still aren't aware of (being like) Walter, so forget about realizing they are like Bortak.
>
> It is unreasonable to expect them to make a movie in which an American doctor is lead up into the middle of the mountains and killed just like Walter. That could probably make a really interesting movie. But they will never make it. For those who shield their eyes even from the reality that they themselves once met up with the fate of Walter probably can't recognize themselves to be Bortak.
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> In our desert, there is something horribly vague mixed in. Before looking at "Oeil pour Oeil" and feeling good, we first need to make our own "Oeil pour Oeil." As far as deserts go (*Koto sabaku ni kansuru kagiri*), the French have stepped far more deeply into the Orient than we have. (66–8)

Abe's mention of Manchuria thus tropes it not only as a nostalgic material location, with a particular climate and landscape where he happened to spend much of his boyhood – as Kuritsubo would have it. Abe clearly identifies Manchuria (alongside Korea) as the site for interaction between the Japanese as imperialist-colonizers and the (native) colonized, or the site for exploring colonial politics. At the same time, Abe severely chastises Japanese for their *denial of both* sides of the colonist economy, or the disavowal of any relationship to the politics of colonialism. Manchuria, the desert locale he discusses first in "The idea of the desert," for Abe, is *never* separated from its ideological and geopolitical actuality as a colony of Japan that was imagined to be only a beginning step toward a greater East-Asian co-prosperity sphere under Japanese domination and for Japanese capitalist needs. Abe's admiration for the film *Oeil pour Oeil*, in other words, is for its honest immediacy in the experiential, visceral relation between the self and the other, which is always mediated by (geopolitically specific) power. In "The idea of the desert" Abe appears interested in the complicated, ambivalent mechanics of desire and aggression between the colonist and native-colonized. As Homi Bhabha explains:

> "It is true that there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place." It is always in relation to the place of the Other that colonial desire is articulated: the phantasmic space of possession that no one subject can singly or fixedly occupy, and therefore permits the dream of the inversion of roles . . . the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's *avenging* anger.[13]

Abe seems to believe (imagine) that when military and state domination are removed from the picture (that is, in the "plastic" desert), human antagonisms, built not necessarily from personal enmities but from geopolitical power politics, can be honestly discharged. And, in the process, a different type of relation to the other becomes possible. (It is important to remember that Abe is in this essay at least talking about representations, that is, explorations of these antagonisms in imaginary contexts.) But it is only from this (discursive/filmic/meditative) exploration, which involves a type of politicized self-reflection, that freedom from the strictures of essentialized, politicized, ethnic/cultural ideology can begin. This self-reflection is, in its broadest sense, also an apprehension of the other, or ethics. As the last sentences of the long quote from Abe's essay above suggest, for this liberation process to begin, the individual must see him/herself as both self and other – that is, must occupy both positions of dominance and subjugation. Abe seems to have intuited something of the complexity of the colonial desire, which Bhabha subsequently articulated as follows:

> The desire for the Other is doubled by the desire in language, which *splits the difference* between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself . . . [T]he very question of identity only emerges *in-between* disavowal and designation. It is performed in the agonistic struggle between the epistemological, visual demand for a knowledge of the Other, and its representation in the act of articulation and enunciation.[14]

As Bhabha suggests, following Lacan, in order to be-the-subject, the subject must "suture" lack – by and through which it constitutes itself in the Symbolic order (and thus in language) – with the illusion of presence, or stand in for the representation in which

> the 'I' is a division but joins all the same, the stand-in is the lack in the structure but nevertheless, simultaneously, the possibility of a coherence, of the filling in. At the end of the suturing function is the ego, the me: 'it's me', the little linguistic scenario of the ego – that I am the only one who can say, can say in so far as I am one. The ego is not to be confused with the subject: it is the fixed point of imaginary projection and identification, where the subject as such is always on the side of the symbolic, the latter the order of its very constitution; but then, precisely, there is no ego without a subject, terrain of its necessity and its hold: function of the symbolic, suture is towards the imaginary, the moment of junction – standing in, a taking place, a something, a some one there.[15]

But something like suture also accompanies apprehension of the other – in the forms of epistemological discourse, Orientalism, for example, the stereotype, or simply, ethnography and anthropology, which designate and hence attempt to fix identity.

In "The idea of the desert" Abe appears concerned (like Bhabha) with a politicized, acculturated version of the act of (filmic and subjective) suture. Filmically, as in the standing in of the idea of the self with the (absent) subject represented on the screen, and simultaneously, subjectively, as in the act of suture by which the human subject imagines itself and imagines, constructs, or fixes the other. He seems no less concerned with the negotiation of subjectivity by and through the other. That is, the awareness that suture does not, in the final analysis, produce a fixed or closed totality, but is an always-temporary (necessary) disavowal of the radical unknowableness of either self or other, which informs also the fetishization that marks the stereotype, or the fixing of the anxiety-producing surplus of otherness. The desert for Abe might provide the "time-lag" in which the practical subject, or as Sakai calls it "*shutai*" (the body of enunciation), makes itself known as the constitutive surplus to the epistemic or objectified subject. It does so in an agentive gesture toward "the repetition of iterative stoppage rather

than the fixity of identity in synchronicity."[16] In other words, Abe seems to be gravitating toward a position recently formulated philosophically and politically by Sakai.

> Unless the issues of the formation and possible transformation of subjectivity are mentioned as an integral part of the understanding of cultural difference, we will not be able to bring forth the sort of theory, of political intervention, that works to effectuate the dislocation of fixed identities and to promote a different articulation of cultural difference . . . In the articulation of cultural difference neither a purely epistemic nor a purely practical relationship to the object is possible; or, one can be neither an outsider positioned completely outside the social world and whose commitment in that world is exhaustively epistemic, nor an insider who simply and blindly lives one's practical relations with it. It follows that, because of the "time lag" and the duality of temporality, the opposition of inside and outside cannot be sustained, or can be reproduced only by means of a series of repressive disavowals.[17]

Against Watsuji's spatialized-relational and particularized theory of subjectivity (which he called *shutai* in opposition to the Kantian epistemological subject, which he called *shukan*), Sakai proposes another definition of *shutai* (thus rescuing the term from the fascist relation to the other that accrued in Watsuji's mobilization of it) as[18]

> that which cannot be contained in the economy of equivalence in a transnational translational exchange. In this respect *shutai* . . . is a hybrid from the outset. It is because of this hybridity that *shutai* must be denied or disavowed in order for the subject to constitute itself. *Shutai* itself is of hybridity that is inevitable in the *process* in which the subject is constituted, but it is erased and disavowed in the subject thus constituted. In this respect, the hybridity of *shutai* is its unrepresentability . . . Although it is feasible at all times to differentiate between the epistemic subject (*shukan*) and the practical agent (*shutai*), of necessity they emerge as overlapping one another while never coinciding with one another. Whereas the epistemic subject emerges in the spatiality of synchronicity, *shutai* always flees such spatiality and can never be present to itself either. *Shutai* is always marked by ecstatic temporality. In other words, *shutai* can never be talked about as the self in its specularity. Therefore, I would like to suggest that, although they have often been called by the same name "subject," they belong to two heterogeneous registers, and that the epistemic subject (*shukan*) is instituted in space, while *shutai* is rather in time as duration.[19]

Sakai's notion of *shutai* emerges, as does Bhabha's "third space" or elsewhere, "time-lag" as that which constitutes a surplus when the fixed

historicist narratives (such as Orientalism) collide with the immediacy of native utterance – as epitomized in the caesura Bhabha places between Fanon's two sentences, "'The black man is not.' [caesura] 'Any more than the white man.'"[20] In the temporal gap of a dualism emerges this third term, as *duration*. Like Sakai and Bhabha, Abe is interested in this "time-lag" between fixed dualisms, the third term or an investigation into the mediation of the Other in the self, as well as into the agency of the politicized subject in social networks, constituted in part through power. No philosopher (I repeat), Abe's articulation is primarily allegorical, literary, and visual, in a sense, untheorized, but I think suggested in the gap or lack of coherence; the caesura of self and Other within the politicized, colonialist relationship that he celebrates in *Oeil pour Oeil* and in his essay. Or, perhaps, simply it is his attempt to somehow *represent* what Sakai calls *shutai*. The desert – and *potentially* the sand of *Woman in the Dunes* – through its catechretic formlessness, then, provides the perfect environment to explore the unrepresentability of the subject or its instability as construct, but also the simultaneous ethical and political necessity to posit it. This positing of the subject, for both Sakai and Abe, is always already in relation to geopolitics (the other) and to the Other.

However, the movement toward understanding the mediation of the Other in the self, in a geopolitical specificity, that Abe lauds in *Oeil pour Oeil* is *not* by any means what happens in the film *Woman in the Dunes*. Why? Perhaps because, as Abe repeats in his essay, there is no desert in Japan. That is to say, no vast formlessness, that is also frontier over which international political interests hover and clash. (Although Okinawa or the Sakhalin Islands might offer the political context they lack the material flux or plasticity of the desert.)

But there might be another reason. "The idea of the desert" was written in 1958. It was in the early 1960s that Abe wrote *Woman in the Dunes*, the Mitsui Miike mine strikes had taken their psychic toll, the anti-Anpo movement had failed, and Japan faced relative economic stability.[21] It was also just before the notion of Japan-as-economic-miracle made its first appearance. Watsuji and folklorist Yanagida Kunio (1875–1962) became popular again as pro-nativist ideologies were reintroduced into all venues of sociocultural and intellectual discourse. Calls to retroactively resuscitate the "innocent" and "blameless" aspects of prewar, pre-occupation Japanese culture (although almost all these calls divested their visions of a new-traditional Japan of any emphasis on the retained imperial system) were, of course, also countered in resistance against this groundswell of reconceptualized Japanism.

As noted briefly above, Sakai positions his formulation of *shutai*, or the practical agent-body of enunciation, against Watsuji's fascistic conception of subjectivity as *shutai*, or a philosophy of praxis about the subjective nature of human beings where, in place of the singularity of the Kantian universal subject, Watsuji proposed a transcendental subjectivity

within a communal universality. As Sakai explains Watsuji's logic, the Japanese word for human being is written using two (originally Chinese) characters: *nin* and *gen*. The first of the two, pronounced "*hito*" except when it is part of a compound word in which case it may be pronounced "*nin*" as in "*nin-gen*," cannot be used to designate the self, but always designates a third person. "*Hito*" refers to the other or others who define the subject as seen from their vantage point; it signifies the mediation of the Other in the subject. Sakai continues, the second word of the compound, which may be pronounced "*aida*" in isolation, designates a spatial between-ness and suggests the broad field of society itself, or the social-relational-material world in which human beings live. Thus *ningen* (*hito-aida*) is a human in a world of others, always mediated by others. But beyond this, the human-being-in-the-world becomes part of an organic, systematic whole that is social, historical, and also particular in terms of geography, climate and ethnicity. Human beings are thus for Watsuji unstable (changeable; and like Nishida's, empty) "beings-between" an ensemble of social relations that are in part dictated by natural environment. In this construct, the subject moves spatially and relationally toward the other, unlike the so-called Western transcendental subject, who moves temporally toward the future, and thus ultimately the Other, or death.[22]

> Watsuji's cultural typology was a version of what I have referred to as *subjective technology* an ensemble of cultural and political techniques to make (*poiein*) the national subject, who could imagine himself or herself to be able to share the suffering of the compatriots. The sense of this emphatic suffering could only be facilitated by creating the object of observation outside the "homosocial" limit of the communal sympathy . . . What we have been witnessing in *Climate and Culture* is one of the most alluring forms of "homosociality" in which the identification of us with ourselves is facilitated by excluding "them" . . . Yet the identity of "us" also has to be articulated, enunciated, and configured in reference to the instituted differences between "them" and "us." And, it is the representation of "us" to ourselves that is achieved in this sort of cultural typology.[23]

Regarding the desert, Watsuji wrote that the word used in modern Japanese to depict desert, *sabaku* is imported from China, whereas

> What we [Japanese] call "*sunahara*" [literally, sand-field] is something different. [The first character of *sa-baku*] "*Sa*" frequently has the sense of "flowing sands" (*ryūsa*), and "*baku*" [of *sa-baku*] also designates Northern sand flows, or a vast ocean of sand that is whipped up into cascades by whirling winds. For Chinese who lived outside of that sort of climate, from their positioning within this [their own] climate, they could only comprehend [deserts] as vast oceans of sand.[24]

Abe's "The idea of the desert" (*Sabaku no shisō*) is about *sabaku*, not *sunahara*. But Abe calls the dunes in *Woman in the Dunes suna*, which means "sand" (and both the film and book titles literally translate into "Sand-woman"; it is also the first character used for both *sabaku* and *sunahara*). This choice of word, I think, is significant. In place of the vast *sabaku* that does not exist in Japan, Abe posits a *suna* that, allegorical and surreal as it is nonetheless evokes the particularity of Japan. *Sabaku* would carry with it, for Abe, another set of geopolitical specificities when used as locale, be it, for example, the Manchurian or North American desert. It is, one might say, a "Japanese version" of *sabaku* – bordered, insular, and specific – that Abe investigates in *Woman in the Dunes*. This, I will argue in the following chapter, is also a site where ethical relation to the other turns into the sort of totalized community espoused in Watsuji's "*aidagara*."

As Abe's essay makes clear, he believes that the mediation of power in human relations is geopolitically specific. Regardless of the universalist cast of his discussion, ranging from Lenin to Japan, in each case Abe particularizes the political circumstances. As Abe interprets it, against a communalized, spatialized totality, in *Oeil pour Oeil*, in the end, neither Bortak nor Walter are subsumed into communalized totality, but move temporally and literally toward death in singularity. In the process, they confront the radical unknowableness of each other as Other (unrepresentable difference/the Real), always attended by the geopolitical context that has made them (culturally) other to each other.

To the contrary, what I think *Woman in the Dunes* does is take a domestic location for a primarily domestic exploration of discourses on domination, ideologies of subjectivity, relation to the other, ethics, and their representations. Against the "ignoring" of geopolitics and other historical contexts that is endemic to interpretations of Abe like Kuritsubo's (to reiterate: severed from history and read purely against axioms of "Western" existentialism), I will show how *Woman in the Dunes* is not just about existential subjectivity, ethics, relation to other and community, arguing that these themes should be preceded by the specific modifier "Japanese." This is also what prevents the film from depicting a psychoanalytic ethics, because in the end desire is precisely that of the named and, moreover, repressive community. That the film can also be interpreted in other cultural contexts or signifies in a purified (i.e., Western) domain of existentialism, does not negate my point. In *Woman in the Dunes*, the *suna*, rather than becoming a site for the honest opening of subjectivity and ethics, or of the relations with the other/Other, becomes a perverse inversion of that possibility. In other words, the ethics of the community in the dunes ends up being what Badiou called "fidelity to the simulacrum," because it is faithfulness to a named, hence fixed, particularism rather than an empty universalism.[25]

6 Social networks and the subject

The film *Woman in the Dunes*, I have already noted, is usually interpreted as an allegory about a universal individualism versus community, and about the discovery of meaningfulness in life and love.[1] For example, Keiko McDonald wrote:

> This is a record of man's centripetal journey to his inner self, the nucleus of basic human emotions . . . The fight against the corrosive, all-enveloping sand represents contemporary man's continuous striving to preserve his inner nature against a dehumanizing society by refusing to wear the social mask. Abe suggests that love between a man and a woman has the potential to create a better world, in that it mitigates man's alienation.[2]

Essays about the film contemporaneous with its debut, however, suggest that at the time of its release the film was actually criticized for being insufficiently universalist, or as a failed attempt at a purely ontological-existential allegory. Kanesaka Kenji's "Eiga sakka to Nihon dasshutsu" ("Filmmakers and the escape from Japan") sees the film as a (attempted) move away from the specifically or particularly Japanese, toward science fiction, yet (unintentionally) too narrow and particular to compare favorably with Kafka. Satō Shigeomi's "Nihonteki shinmetorii kara no dasshutsu: *Suna no onna* ni itaru zoūkei rinen o megutte" ("Escape from Japanese symmetry: On the notion of plasticity leading up to *Woman in the Dunes*") calls *Woman in the Dunes* an inferior "variation on Kafka" (like Kanesaka does) and strongly criticizes both Abe and Teshigahara for the mundane repetition of everyday norm that renders the film footage, according to him, ordinary. Both critics thus take the film to task for being not sufficiently universally "ontological."[3] In other words, at the time of its release, Japanese critical reception overwhelmingly read the film as being about *Japan*, as I do. I, however, do not consider this a flaw or shortcoming.

An exception to more conventional evaluations of the film that criticized its lack of universalism was Ogura's. He praised its relevance for contemporaneous Japanese society.

> There is a very cutting satirical significance of this allegory of a man who [had at first] criticized "I don't know if we are shoveling sand to live, or, living to shovel sand," giving up all attempts to escape to the outside world, and [instead] discovering meaning through engaging in this meaningless labor ([although] the villagers assert that it has meaning). The circumstances of this process of being buried in the spiritual environment (*seishin teki fūdo*) of community solidarity and the like – which is not such a simple thing [as you might think] – is so absolutely appropriate to actuality in Japan that it made me shiver.[4]

Ogura's very short review does not, however, explain in any detail *how* or *why* the film was so "appropriate to actuality in Japan." That, in general, is the objective of this chapter. I begin my discussion with some primarily descriptive passages regarding the film's opening sequences that could, when other subsequent aspects of the film are ignored, easily be interpreted universally and, in fact, do suggest an ontological inquiry transcendental of the particularity of Japan. Next, I proceed to the task of reintroducing ideological context to the inquiry. As the film develops its paradigms of village ethics, lifestyle, means of production, labor, and so forth, I find a different, much more particular reading becomes urgent. I will also show why I think that an act of "ignoring" like Kuritsubo's (as explicated in the previous chapter) is essential to what I have already called a similar severing of the film *Woman in the Dunes* from its historical and political context to read it (only) against the (universal, "apolitical," purely individualistic) axioms of "Western" existentialism.

Immediately after the completion of the opening titles, the camera cuts to an apparently abstract and unrecognizable shape.[5] A relatively quick series of subsequent cuts places the camera further and further from the object being viewed. In these shots, it is not clear to the spectator that what are being shot are particles of sand in extreme close-up, although at increasingly longer range, until Niki enters the open-frame screen from the bottom. His back is to the camera as he walks laboriously up what can now be recognized as a steep sand dune. (Thus, Niki literally gives relational meaning, or definition, to the environment.) Eerily discordant, modern synthesized music punctuates his movements now and again, interrupting an otherwise silent sequence with no sound effects, ambient sound, music, or dialogue whatsoever. A sudden cut to the sun blinds the camera temporarily. Extreme long shots of Niki dwarfed by huge expanses of sand-mountains, sometimes in the center of the frame, sometimes only peripherally in frame, alternate with extreme close-ups of insects scuttling about. There is a long shot of the ocean meeting the sandy shores. Interspersed are shots that allow the spectator to understand that Niki is searching out, photographing, and capturing these insects. Occasional montage sequences of sand-in-motion or sand flows that resemble those of water intercut

human-dominated sequences (in these opening moments, exclusively shots of Niki) – a visual pattern that recurs throughout the film. During these sand-centered montage sequences, the viewer is often not sure exactly what material he or she is looking at; it shifts and changes form so steadily that even the material properties are put in flux. The sand here certainly makes literal the idea Watsuji put forward about *sabaku*, or sand likened to the vast, flowing ocean (as discussed in the previous chapter).

After this opening sequence, the camera cuts to a shot of Niki resting (sitting and then reclining) in a beached rowboat filled with sand (reiterating the conceit of likeness between sand and water) and a voiceover is heard, clearly Niki's thoughts spoken aloud for the benefit of the spectator. He lists certificates, "Written contracts, licenses, identification cards, permits, deeds, registrations, permits to carry, letters of commendation, promissory notes, IOUs, temporary permits, written consents, income certificates, even family histories." Listed in this litany are relational documents by means of which individuals are fitted into and delimited within modern bureaucratic society. These are the so-called contracts between individual and national, state, provincial or local governments that function to define, constrain, identify, and confer privileges onto those "recognized" and licensed individuals. Hence, these are abstract and mediated indexes of individual relation to community, or social belongingness and position. They comprise identities: an individual in a sense "is" what these documents say he or she is. Commonly, and particularly efficaciously in Japan at that time, these certificates also provide the means by which the state keeps track of the whereabouts and activities of its citizens. They represent the modern institutional controls of individual actions through the gathering of information in the guise of maintaining order and regulating behavior in the interests of law and the community. This theme is actually introduced earlier in the title sequence in which the graphics are adorned by reproductions of the *hanko* (personal seals that take the place of signatures in Japan) and fingerprints of the actors, director, and crew. Thus, the litany of certificate names is an elaboration on an already established issue.

But what the spectator sees against this voiceover is a lone man isolated in a sea of sand where he relates only to a natural universe. Many hours are condensed as Niki busily examines, photographs, and captures sand-beetles. Later he will confess his goal to the woman: he wants to have his name recorded somewhere as the man who discovered a new species of sand-beetle. He has traveled to the dunes in search of a type of immortality possible only in the modern world with its attentiveness to innovation, singularity, and attributions to individuals. His dream is a fully modern, abstract-alienated version of making a mark, or leaving a trace in (discursive) human society; the obscure and irrelevant etching of a name in a text, ostensibly into perpetuity. Like the certificates this vision implodes. The certificates are apparently useless in inspiring or helping anyone to find the imprisoned Niki; at the film's end, the spectator is merely shown another

document that pronounces him missing. Importantly, Niki has given up escaping. His original, individualistic, and egotistical quest – to be named in a book – has been replaced with other (communal) interests.

In these opening sequences it is obvious, and commentators have overwhelmingly agreed, that the film is not only about how human beings take their place in and are produced by and produce within environment. It is a broader inquiry into how human beings in modern society are defined or demarcated, or how they take their subjective places in the world. Or more abstractly, it is about issues of subjectivity and being in relation to the other/Other. These themes become increasingly profound as the film progresses. The filmic presentation obviously evokes Sartre's discussion of the gaze of the other as described in his anecdotes of the watcher in the park and the peeper at the keyhole, where the illusion of omnipotence as the gazer is shattered by the potential intrusion of another gazer. Thus, the gazer is turned into the one aware of being (potentially) watched, and the subject is constituted in part through this relation to the Other.[6] In *Woman in the Dunes*, the entomologist becomes the "examined" (the resonance with Sartre's anecdotes is strengthened by the fact that, being a filmic representation, it is perfectly suited for an inquiry into the politics of the visual and the gaze in the formation of subjectivity). On a formal level, mirroring the entomologist's occupational entrapment, observation, and examination of insects, the camera examines in minute detail the properties of their environments; here, the sand, but equally the properties of human beings and their social networks. The examination stresses a variety of aspects of *relational* bases for subjectivity and identification. As noted above, the documents listed, after all, are the relational-identifying documents that are supposed to track a human's whereabouts and lock them into identity. The relationship of the human being to the universal is both ontologically and metaphysically suggested in a relational "being-ness," materially in the intercuts between Niki and the sand, the insects and the sand, Niki and the insects, and abstractly, between Niki and society as symbolized by the certificate-litany. From the film's very beginning (and emphasized as the film progresses) the problematic of the subject in various relations, or social and ontological networks, is highlighted. Thus, as I will continue to show, the inquiry into subjectivity is commensurate with the general ideological concern (as elucidated in "Space, geopolitics, and 'The idea of the desert'") with the *relational* human being (*ningen* or person-in-between) and *aidagara*, or the relations between people that comprise community.

That Abe should have been so concerned with the question of subjectivity and community comes as little surprise to anyone cognizant of the Japanese intellectual climate of the early 1960s. The importance of the issue of subjectivity (*shutaisei*) in Japan from the mid-1940s into the mid-1960s can hardly be exaggerated. In contradistinction to the prewar and wartime fascist marshaling of theories of subjectivity in support of an ethnic-nationalism, Barshay writes that the subjectivity debates of the immediate

postwar, which had *begun among literary critics and writers*, "formed a touchstone for all subsequent attempts to develop a nonnationalist system of ethics for action in the public sphere."[7] This was true of both the left and the right.

The litany of certificate names concludes. A woman's face and shoulders appear in medium close-up floating horizontally, face down, in superimposition over the sand at the top of the screen as the voiceover continues. A terse, abstract discourse on certificates and human beings, separated into the categories of men and women, tells the spectator that these certificates represent attempts to ward off undefined fears of the vague, or that which cannot easily be captured in simple categories. This voiceover, like the sand itself, suggests the theme of a surplus, or the catechretic spilling over of material beyond category, beyond the proper; unsettling fixity with unbelongingness or unbelongability. (This, of course, is also the arena of the Real.) Against the continuity of the voiceover, the visuals shift. The woman is now walking, still superimposed over the dunes. She is dressed in modern urban skirt and blouse, hair neatly pulled back, and is oblivious to the voiceover as well as the (or any) environment. The voiceover changes from its abstract discursive affect to what sounds like comments directed at the woman who is now seated in the background, opposite Niki facing him and the camera, intently focused on him as though the two were in conversation. He, however, does not return her gaze as in an accusatory tone he accuses her, still in voiceover, his lips unmoving and his gaze elsewhere, "you always accuse me of being argumentative, but it's not me that's argumentative, it's the facts [that are]." The woman's figure disappears from the screen.

Perhaps surprising for some Western European and North American readers, who might tend to equate procommunist literary and filmic productions with Chinese and Russian social realism, as well as with the genre known as Japanese prewar proletarian literature, Japanese literati of the postwar, many of whom were active members of the Communist Party and many more of whom were leftist in orientation although not directly affiliated with the communist movement, almost immediately challenged the earlier (proletarian literary) embrace of a "mandatory 'objectivism.'"[8] Activists for democratic reform in the postwar, as Barshay has argued, were composed of at least two factions of intellectuals who were widely influential (even in watered-down public versions bandied about in mass media and other popular venues). These comprised a class-based revolutionary Marxist faction and a modernist one that "drew substantially on Marxism but abjured the centrality of class in favor of a notion of praxis derived variously from the ego and its desires, personal ethics, or from objectivist models of adaptive behavior."[9] For writers and other intellectuals, this modernist vision combined with the dominant, immediate postwar (1946–8) philosophic debates on subjectivity. This period coincided with Abe's final return to Japan from Manchuria, when he joined the Communist Party.

Over time Abe had many varied affiliations with literary groups and coteries including those that published the literary journals *Kindai bungaku*, *Shin Nihon bungaku* and the avant-garde artists' associations *Yoru no kai* and *Seiki no kai*.[10] Some writers were convinced that surrealism was the best artistic mechanism for politicized narrative; early in his writing career Abe was one of them. According to Motoyama Mutsuko, Hanada Kiyoteru, the founder of "*Yoru no kai*" (also affiliated at that time with *Shin Nihon bungaku*) deeply influenced Abe during this period. "Hanada insisted on a radical departure from Renaissance humanism in which human beings occupied center stage; he further advocated materialism in which equality is extended to all things, not only to humans and animals but also to the inanimate. Surrealism was the only approach that could create his vision of a world of total equality."[11] It was under Hanada's influence that Abe wrote such narratives as "Dendorokakariya"[12] (1949) or "Akai mayu" ("Red cocoon," 1950), in which his dedication to surrealism is evident. These texts are not about specific individuals in a psychological sense, but about ideas of transformation played out in non-human-centered imaginary contexts.

Abe published *Woman in the Dunes*, as already noted, just after his disengagement from the Communist Party. The book marks a shift in Abe's prose style from pure surrealism to what might best be described as allegory. The film faithfully captures this sense of allegory. Early footage prepares the spectator for the unusual. The floating superimposed woman, the discontinuity between visual image and sound, be it the discordant music or the voiceover, and the temporary post-title disorientation toward the visual image (as described above) all combine to estrange, or make unfamiliar, scenes that if shot more conventionally would not be particularly noteworthy. The film thus announces itself as an exploration of possibility, or the imaginary. In fact, as the superimposed woman first appears while Niki is reclining after a strenuous stretch of exploration in the dunes, it is as if the rest of the film might be nothing but his dream (except, of course, he never wakes up). The "urban" woman who appears in superimposition also foreshadows one of the themes of *Woman in the Dunes*: the gendered question of relation to the other. She, urban, abstract, surrealistic, contentious, and critical, makes a marked contrast with the rural, earthly, material, and accepting woman of the dunes with and through whom Niki eventually discovers both self and relation to the other. From the film's beginning, the question of subjectivity and (gendered) ethics are thus allegorically, rather than realistically, presented.

The repeating montage sequences of sand-water flows are another allegorical presentation. They are the *visualization* of a discursive theme that runs throughout the book, of Niki's attempt to arrive at some coherent understanding about the properties of the universe. This discursive theme is deeply environmental and concrete-material in its descriptive aspects. It is indeed a query that has universal import and one that can be read sundered

from any particularized manifestation of modernity. It is as if through the inquiry into the properties of sand *qua* environment, the universe will yield up answers as to its existence and ours in it ("ours" in the temporarily homogeneous sense of "we as human beings"). In the film, visual representations replace what in the book are abstract verbiages. This is one reason why it becomes more aesthetic than metaphysical. It can be looked at, but it is no longer a dissertation of its own. Rather, it is environment caught in the camera/human gaze. Sand/water becomes as much a character as the human beings (reminiscent of Abe's earlier narratives that refuse human-centrism). What in the book is an existential quest regarding the properties of being and existence itself, in the film becomes deeply aesthetic (evocative of, although not a replication of the notions of aestheticized-being described in the section on Kawabata). The sand-montage sequences interrupt the narrative proper, directing viewer attention to the purely visual aspects of filmic representation. Here and there the spectator is lost in a moment of pure gaze; the sand is momentarily not an object of emotion, or logic, or to be judged as moral or immoral, pleasant or unpleasant. It is simply beautiful. At the same time, because there is something massively ominous about these flows, a sensation of dread and the awesome is enhanced by the synthesized sound track replete with crescendos and the ebbing and cresting of volume. Viewer apprehension of the sand montages at moments approaches the sensation of the sublime (against which the spectator is rendered doubly secure in his/her knowledge that this is after all only a film image). Sand's essential formlessness or changeability suggests then, also, catechrises or signification severed from semantic fixity. Thus it is a materialization of the process of ex-propriation, where property's relation to the "proper" is made clear: the village in the dunes, it is already suggested, is a hierarchical deprivation of what is (illusorily) one's own, or property/the proper.[13]

Still in keeping with the allegorical nature of the film, once in the dunes, Niki's existence is dominated by the environment in so complete a manner it borders on the surreal. This becomes more obvious after he is deposited into the sandpit (in the book it is simply called a "hole" [*ana*]). There is of course no electricity or running water. But more ominously, sand is everywhere, settling on and coating, grating against surfaces, wafting down in a never ending trickle from the thatched roof, on occasion in huge threatening cascades. Food and water containers are tightly closed off, spread with cloth covers to protect them from the sand. As Niki sits down to eat a dinner that the woman has prepared for him, she opens an umbrella, hanging it on a hook over him. He receives this gesture with some show of disdain, as though it were a silly and unnecessary action, only to respond with a degree of shock when, meal over, he tilts the umbrella and sand pours off it onto the floor beside him. In response to his question if the roof needs rethatching, she assures him that no, even newly thatched roofs leak sand. There ensues a stilted and somewhat antagonistic conversation in which she elaborates briefly on the various hardships she must counter to

live in this environment, such as voracious wood-eating beetles that destroy house beams, and sand that attracts water and therefore rots sandals. To each point Niki counters with his contention that what she describes is scientifically illogical and, therefore, can't be. In a thoroughly pompous manner he ridicules her lived experience with his modern, scientific knowledge. Niki has begun the process of being "thrown out of joint."

> The Real happens to us (we encounter it) *as impossible*, as "the impossible thing" that turns our symbolic universe upside down and leads to the reconfiguration of this universe. Hence the impossibility of the Real does not prevent it from having effect in the realm of the possible. This is when ethics comes into play, in the question forced upon us by an encounter with the Real: will I act in conformity with what threw me "out of joint," will I be ready to reformulate what has hitherto been the foundation of my existence? Badiou calls this question – or rather this attitude – a "fidelity to the event" or "the ethics of truth." For Lacan, the accent is to be placed, first, on desire ("Have you acted in conformity with the desire which inhabits you?"), for it is desire that aims at the impossible, the Real.[14]

At this point in the film, however, Niki is fiercely clinging to the order of the world outside the village, rather than beginning a process of acting in relation to the impossible.

Eventually, the conversation shifts to a more personal level and the spectator meets a caring, empathetic side of Niki when he reacts with true compassion to her tale of losing her husband and daughter to a sandstorm. Harsh frontal lighting illuminates little more than the human figures, the background of the hut and the exterior recede into dark impenetrable shadow. The now closed-frame camera follows the woman from behind as she spreads bedding for Niki while telling her tale. Only the contours of her face, stark white in the surrounding dimness, can be seen in the 3/4 back shot. The spectator cannot discern her expression as she relates her tragedy. The camera follows her in focus as she crosses the frame behind Niki; he sits out-of-focus in the foreground, intoning, "How horrible." Suddenly the light goes out. "It's the sand," she informs him as she re-lights the solitary lamp. In this village, the environment dominates absolutely. And the environment *is* the sand.

Satō Shigeomi wrote that once Niki enters the pit, he has been transformed from a youth to a "working member of society (*shakaijin*)."

> There, labor turned purposeless continues. Who's paying the wages? Who is, and in what way, continuing the exploitation? We don't know the whole story [literally: We don't know the totality (*zentai wa wakaranai*)]. However, when one halts this labor-made-meaningless, what comes immediately is starvation and alienation. The sand is "the whole"

> that ceaselessly erodes that "individual part" [*ko*, the first character of the compound for "individual" or *kojin*]; we live in the midst of that subsistence (*sonzai*).[15]

McDonald's interpretation of the sand is similar,

> [The sand is] an index of society, a monolithic dynamic that subjugates its individual components. Society is not inert. Just as sand asserts its tyranny in diverse forms . . . society overwhelms the individual in many ways . . . the inescapable threat of sand; society sifts even into the very core of human existence – the love between man and woman – thus dooming every individual to alienation.[16]

Pollack held that (in the book) "the encroaching sand . . . represents entropy, time, change, history."[17] I would add, through its plasticity, or catechretic formlessness, the sand offers the perfect environment in which to explore the unrepresentability of the subject and the Other. And, as I hope to show, it also offers the simultaneous ethical and political necessity to posit the subject in relation to geopolitics and to the other.

The domination of the village and villages by the sand *qua* "natural" environment is on the one hand certainly ontological-transcendental (human versus nature), but on the other hand simultaneously allegorical of Japanese premodern industry; the "feudalistic" pre-industrial elements that many intellectuals saw as tenaciously tainting full, or true, modernity. This is how, in part, the sand is "*suna*" rather than "*sabaku*" as I noted in "Space, geopolitics, and 'The idea of the desert,' " or suggests the specificity of the sand-as-metaphor. Technologized human community in the form of modern capitalism (the certificates and the clanging train in the title soundtrack) is immediately contrasted with, by being *replaced* in the film by a pre-technologized, premodern one. Enveloped by sands resistant to human-technological attempts to mold it into static form, the villagers live a poverty-ridden, labor-dominated life where the mode of production is semi-feudal. Although the sand itself is without fixed form, the sand shapes lives.

Taken together, these elements suggest to me that alongside its ontological-transcendental significance, sand is also indisputably capital. In and of itself it has no use-value for the villagers; to the contrary it is a huge burden. The villagers can do nothing with the sand. They can neither eat it, nor harvest it, nor make handicrafts from it. It only takes on significance and economic value in the context of its being exchanged. For the villagers it has pure exchange value. In exchange for their productive labor (which produces sand as a commodity as well) they are given food, water, and occasional "luxury" items (cheap alcohol, cigarettes). All the villagers work to produce the same product, yielding large amounts of that product (sand). It is moreover, as capital, the material medium (the "thing") for the

mediation of social relations in the village. The villagers' network of interrelations and interdependence revolves completely around the clearing and collecting of the sand (appended by the occasional kidnapping, made necessary by the demands of sand-clearing labor), as does the relationship that develops between Niki and the woman.[18]

The sand is also the means by which domination over, and exploitation of, the villagers is ensured. Moreover, labor recalling feudal production, while also evoking early capitalist expropriation, provides the foundation for an openly corrupt capitalism that profits (although only minimally it appears) at the top of the structure, and that maintains power hegemony through the indoctrination of ideology as well as through punitive measures for non-compliance. Disallowed free action, the villagers must depend upon the approval or good will of the village collective for their very survival. Rations, including water, are delivered weekly. As the woman makes perfectly clear to Niki and as he in fact discovers, the rations are not given free of charge. They are distributed in exchange for work. Work, it turns out, is manual labor. She shovels sand for hours, until dawn, she informs him, into buckets that are hoisted up and collected by a team of villagers who arrive at a designated hour and stand at the top of the pit. Extra or surplus labor done during the woman's free time begets special goods such as the radio that arrives toward the end of the film. There is no money circulating within this village that evokes feudalism. However, the spectator understands that money as capital indeed flows on the upper levels, from the construction company to the village collective and in Niki's previous life in Tokyo. (When he tries to depart the village without awakening the woman the first morning, he leaves money for her in apparent exchange for her having put him up for the night.) The collective produces the shovels and other work implements; the villagers are not independent laborers who sell their labor. In this sense sand is, as means of production, social relations, and of domination, capital.[19]

As Niki reclines in the boat on the beach prior to being imprisoned, possibly asleep, he is brought out of this reverie by a disembodied voice addressing him, "Sensei" (literally, teacher or doctor). He sits and looks up, shading his eyes from the blinding sun, at the villager, identified in the following subjective shot from Niki's perspective. The low angle of the camera suggests the villager's dominance in this environment. At the same time, in contrast, the address "Sensei" by the villager reveals the class difference between the two: one a poor villager, apparently a laborer from his attire, and the other a semi-professional scientist from Tokyo. Niki speaks an unaccented, "unmarked," standard Japanese (*hyōjungo*), while the villager uses regional dialect, underscoring his localism and particularism. A stark distinction marks the rift between the rural and the urban and the middle and lower classes. A jarring cut to a cinematically unestablished space reveals two additional villagers crouched nearby, suddenly placing the first villager in a group of *nakama*, or a community-of-the-same. The

spatial relationship is evident only in their gaze, which in the subsequent cut the spectator confirms is indeed directed at Niki, who appears isolated against this group. Informing Niki that he has missed the last bus, they discuss where he will put up for the night, laughing at his suggestion that he might walk to a place with an inn or hotel. The villager offers to help him find accommodations at someone's private home, although forewarning that because of the poverty of the village, they will not be sumptuous. Niki enthusiastically agrees to the idea of staying in a local home. The home they procure for him is inhabited by a single, widowed woman. This home will become his prison. As the film progresses, however, as they did in Japanese Marxist discourses of the time, class issues become secondary to the focus on the individual-in-community. Here in the pit-home, he will gradually be stripped of his "difference" (educated, urban, bourgeois) and incorporated (interpellated) into a homogeneous, rural, premodern community symbolic, as I will show, of Japanese ethnicity, or *minzoku*.

Pollack noted that the villagers' world

> is clearly a critique of the fate of the traditional rural village in modern, urban, capitalist Japan. These poor and remote farmers and fishermen have been abandoned by the state, which has given up on the impossible task of trying to prevent the constantly encroaching entropic sand from swallowing up their fields and homes (the story is set near the coastal city of Sakata, an area whose villagers' problems Abe became fascinated with after reading an article about them in *Asahi Graph*).[20]

Attention to retained pockets of so-called semi-feudalism in rural areas of a rapidly industrializing, capitalist Japan made up part of the 1960s continuing debate over whether or not Japan was truly "modern," a debate that also had its roots in the prewar.[21] Because so many of the writers, intellectuals, and critics engaged in this debate were Marxist or at least leftist, it often made reference to one or the other of the two main schools of Japanese Marxism (*ronoha* and *konoha*) which differed, primarily, along the axis of describing the Meiji Restoration (1868) as a bourgeois revolution or not. Accordingly, how the Restoration was characterized determined "correct" subsequent action.[22] As Barshay writes, the eminent intellectuals Maruyama Masao and Ōtsuka Hisao both

> saw in Japan a society that had industrialized on the basis of a still premodern rural social base and consciousness, that of the "community." . . . For Ōtsuka, the "community" was a remaining problem to be solved; the "modern human type" could not otherwise be formed. Maruyama saw the great task of enlightenment in dissecting and transforming the thought, mentality, or psychology of the masses, who were until now, or even still, mired in "Asiatic" or (semi-) feudal backwardness. Its great antagonist and challenge was Japan's "tenacious

> familial (*dōzokudanteki*) social structure and its ideology, which is the hothouse of the old nationalism."[23]

The village in the dunes evidences a mass mentality that is not only feudalistic, but backward (that is, not modern) in its familial social structure and ideology. It is important to note that around the time when Abe wrote the book and the screenplay, against resolute modernists like Maruyama, the concept of *minzoku*, or the people as ethnic community, was staging a strong revival – *among leftists*.

> Ironically, in view of the entrenched position of *minzoku* as the favored antagonist to class in the historical visions of the [Zen Buddhist] Kyoto school thinkers [in the prewar, and in support of Japanese fascist-imperialism], the term seems to have been reintroduced to public discourse in the early postwar years by the left itself.[24]

It stands to reason that, given its historical context, Abe's exploration of capitalism in Japan of the 1960s makes class secondary to the issues of modernity and individual subjectivity – *and tropes the individual as a member of a specific minzoku*. The intertwined issues and debates over modernization-democratization and subjectivity tended across their other differences to collectively focus their efforts on calling for the transformations of individual people: in order to have a truly modern Japan, the logic went, modernity had to be expressed in individuals.[25] The Japanese notion of the individual was generally divested of so-called egoism and increasingly reinterpreted as, in a sense, the individual in service to the community, which continued overwhelmingly to be imagined as an ethnologized, homogeneous one.

Motoyama wrote, "it was the defense of artistic freedom rather than the rejection of the communist ideal that prompted Abe to join his literary colleagues in a mass exodus from the JCP [Japanese Communist Party]" just prior to writing *Woman in the Dunes*.[26] The ideological clash that led to the mass exodus/expulsion of members from the Party was, however, not simply over artistic freedom. It was the further extension of intellectual battles within and around the Party over questions of the relationship of subjectivity to praxis, and ethnos versus class. Members also fought over the reinvigoration of Japanese communism with (revised in the postwar) notions of being integral to the Kyoto school in discourses by philosophers such as Nishida and Watsuji (in spite of their wartime complicity with fascism), which incorporated an ethics of relationalism. (Although this was generally divorced from the collectivity of the ethnic nation in compensation for its complicity with Japanese fascism.) In the late 1950s into the early 1960s – in the wake of the occupation – ideologically linked to the resurgence of the notion of the Japanese *minzoku*, there was an attempt to separate out the "good" aspects of prewar Japan from the bad and rediscover a *positive*

Japanese traditionalism. The period thus saw the revival of discourses on Japanese exceptionalism and anti-individualism (in the negative "Western" sense of excessive egoism), all accompanied by a growing sense of relative economic stability.[27] The subjectivity debates had shifted to reintegrate the modern individual into a specifically Japanese community that was to be discovered in a nostalgic, idealized traditional society.

Barshay points out that

> Popular aspirations for stability . . . heartened conservative nationalists who understood that while the aspects of the "old" society associated with war and mass death remained thoroughly discredited, other "cultural" orientations might indeed be reinvigorated and used to restore national self-respect, along with social and political discipline.[28]

The premodern (semi-feudal) life led by the villagers in *Woman in the Dunes* is replete with indexes evoking cultural particularism, or "the old Japanese way" of doing things – laboring and living "as it has always been done in Japan." Kanesaka noted "the Japanese structure ever since antiquity, and its unique composition, recirculated from grandmother to mother, from mother to daughter, from daughter to granddaughter, of *Woman in the Dunes*."[29] The village can be seen as a *hyperbolic* dramatization of the calls for a reinvigoration of traditional old Japan – because in the village industrialization is *rejected*.

Precisely, in the 1960s, as part of the reinvention of new-traditional Japan and the reinvigoration of "good" Japanese traditions, a valorization of premodern (pre-technological) forms of labor and production had begun. This is still being reiterated and reproduced today daily on television, particularly NHK (Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai), or the national, government-owned and operated network, in magazines and newspapers, in programs and articles that celebrate hand-made (*tezukuri*) consumer goods, from foodstuffs to textiles and handicrafts.[30] Retained pockets of pre-industrialized production everywhere are celebrated as the repositories of tradition.

In *Woman in the Dunes* when Niki complains about the ludicrousness of the hard labor done the old-fashioned way the woman informs him that the village association looked into technologizing the process, which would obviously improve the lives of the villagers. However, such industrialization was rejected because it was too expensive and would erode profit margins. The esteem invested in work done the old-fashioned way is disclosed to be part of an ideology to support capitalist exploitation of the means of, and subsistence based on, "feudal-like" production. The filmic portrayal powerfully counters the cultural elevation of pre-industrial labor in its refusal to aestheticize the woman's work. There is neither anything indexical of Japan, nor beautifully linked to particularized cultural consumptions in her labor.[31] It also suggests a parody of the celebration of (pre-industrial) daily activities in Zen (as reinvigorated in the postwar), such as the labor of

chopping wood as a praxis by which communion with the universal is made possible. The hard labor in *Woman in the Dunes* appears absurd once the relation of the village to capital and the refusal of modernization are disclosed. It is not that the villagers work to live, although this is what they believe. They work to allow for the flow of capital, for the pathetic profit of the poverty-stricken association (making it doubly ironic). Simply said, they are exploited. This again is mirrored in the filmic focus on the sand in its rawest form, as flow and as material, but also as capital. At the same time, as already noted, human praxis (labor) is absolutely social; it provides the nexus for human relations. Through shared labor Niki comes to understand both interdependence and intimacy. Shots of the couple laboring dominate many of the scenes. One might say that being itself in *Woman in the Dunes* is in this sense "laborized." Life here equals labor.

Other elements contrast the village in the dunes with modern life as it was then lived in urban Japan. During his first night, and intercut with the scene of the first morning, Niki checks his watch. Close-ups highlight the ponderously slow passage of time. The close-ups of the watch, moreover, remind the viewer of the importance of time. As he himself proclaims, Niki is on a schedule, he lives in the modern world, his life punctuated by hours and minutes in the allocation of time to various tasks and the appropriate temporal frameworks for those tasks. Niki needs to know what time it is to situate himself in being, to have a meaningful existence. The watch thus functions here as an index of modernity's homogeneous time. (As do the apparently relatively up-to-date newspaper fragments that wrap items dropped into the pit, which Niki unwraps and smoothes out to consume voraciously.) Increasingly long intervals between shots of his watch signal the waning of the dominance of the modern politics of time in Niki's life. As the first night settles in, the woman announces that she has to go to work. In her world there is a temporal inversion of the normal world's organization of work and repose. (And labor divorced from "natural" temporality, in the form of the night shift, is of course yet another effect of capital.)[32] After the first morning, when Niki becomes aware that he is a prisoner, there are no more shots of the watch. Time, in a modern sense, has ceased to dominate. At the film's conclusion, the spectator is shocked to realize that seven years have passed. This shock stresses the fact that there has been a shift from a temporally dominated world to a spatial one in the most literal sense.

Hence, Niki is first stripped of all and varied markers of his modernity: the perception of national homogeneous time, his free will and individualism, even his scientific rationalism. After he is thus "emptied" he is, as I will continue to show, refilled by community with so-called old-fashioned values, labor, lifestyle, and ideologies. Niki is first transformed from a cog in a modern, alienated world of capitalism, seeking symbolic capital (his name in a book), to a slave-laborer in a semi-feudal community, kept against his will and forced to perform essential labor for the community that, so to speak, lies at the lowest level of Japanese capitalism. Moreover, the

exploitative labor, the barely human living conditions, and the lack of freedom that Niki is subjected to there cannot be blamed on a corrupt state government and the imperial system. In this village there is no state or emperor present (as in Abe's *sabaku* in his "The idea of the desert"). There is only the local village association. But control, repression, and interference with individuals' lives are, rather than lessened, tightened. In this environment Niki learns to relate to one woman, so there is another, *personal* transformation, one might even ironically call it growth or development in that he has become ethical in his relations with her. Importantly, it is through the woman as a "tool" that Niki is successfully entrapped, and it is the woman who first empties him of his modernity and then refills him with community ideology. And finally, he becomes a participating member of that community, defined by his productive labor. By the time Niki has discovered how to extract water from sand, he has become part of that community, as attested in his desire to share his discovery. In the end, he has been thoroughly interpellated as a subject, as in the process theorized by Louis Althusser.

> In the ordinary use of the term, subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission. This last note gives us the meaning of this ambiguity, which is merely a reflection of the effect which produces it: the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall submit freely to the commandments of the Subject, i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection "all by himself." *There are no subjects except by and for their subjection*. That is why they "work all by themselves."[33]

His labor is why Niki is needed in the village, and also the reason he survives to become "a subject, free to decide his own fate." It is through laboring that Niki is indoctrinated into the village structure and local mentality. It is also through laboring side by side with the woman that he becomes capable of an erotic-ethical relationship. But only when he "works all by himself" for the good of the community is he granted "subjectivity" and "free will."

This indoctrination is itself a slow and "labored" process. Awakening the first morning to find the ladder on which he descended gone, Niki attempts to leave without disturbing the slumbering woman. A medium long shot of him crawling futilely up the sides of the sand pit as the sand simply shifts and gives way beneath him foreshadows his more desperate attempts to escape that follow later. Realizing that he cannot crawl up and out, Niki returns to the house, apologetically awakens the woman and requests the ladder. Her response is fully physical and nonverbal: she shifts position,

turning away from him. The camera pans up and down between Niki and the woman he is standing over, whose back is to him. Her expression, revealed to the spectators in a close up, looks frightened – like a trapped animal. However, it dawns on Niki that, since the ladder by which he descended was made of rope, it cannot be hung from below. With this he realizes two things in quick succession: that he has been intentionally detained here and that the woman has colluded to trap him. Niki accuses her. At that moment the house begins to shake and sand pours in from the roof. Niki runs outside and his subjective shot reveals sand cascading down the sides of the pit, a waterfall of sand. A cut to the house interior frames the lamp shaking as in an earthquake. Niki reenters the house where the woman is now dressing. The camera follows her from behind, thus denying the spectator access to her gaze as she finishes dressing, fixing her hair, and folding bedding. During this sequence, in response to Niki's questions, threats, and accusations, she repeats a simple apology appended by the statement, "But you must understand. It's hard for a woman alone here." It is in the ensuing conversation that the question of why she remains in the village, why there is no technology, and the ethic of community responsibility are first made clear, evidencing her thorough ideological indoctrination to the community. These "reasons" are repeated and expounded upon in subsequent sequences. She explains that if she does not see to the clearing of the sand around her house, it will be buried by sand. Niki retorts, "So what? Let it be buried!" To which she adds that the neighboring house will be put in jeopardy, highlighting her overriding concern for the community. Niki suggests that she owes nothing, has no obligations (*giri*) to the village, to no avail. Realizing that she will not help him, Niki sets about trying to shovel a pathway out of the pit by approaching the problem "scientifically." A cut to the woman in her doorway watching him struggle is paired with her point of view to the top edge of the pit where the same three villagers stand and watch him as well. Her collusion here is shown passively. Unlike Niki, she is apparently free to leave but has chosen to remain in this community. But it is a little later in the film that the spectator understands more clearly her relationship to the village.

After realizing that he cannot escape by his own wits or muscle, several sequences of the film footage are dedicated to chronicling Niki's attempt to overturn the power balance and force the villagers to let him go. *His rebellion and insubordination take the form of refusing to work*. In order to ensure the woman's "cooperation" he ties her up to *prevent her from working*. He gags her to prevent her from speaking (*interpellating with ideology*). In these sequences the woman is rendered helpless, and Niki appears strong and defiant, confident of the success of his plan. After all, she must be a valued member of the community. The villagers must care about her. And besides, as she has pointed out, if they don't work the neighboring house is in jeopardy. Time passes with her bound and gagged, turned into a pawn (even a victim) in the power battle Niki wages with the village collective. Niki

makes this clear, by repeatedly absolving her of any personal blame, even apologizing to her for making her suffer. This is in spite of the fact that Niki knows that the village association needed her collusion to succeed in its plan to entrap him. Nonetheless, she is exonerated. It does not take a leap in logic to guess that this perspectival shift is facilitated because she is a woman. That rations are only given to households with men reinforces the fact that as a woman she is already coded as holding less social and labor value than a man (in spite of her superior strength in the beginning). These codes function to obscure her doubled role as victimizer.

As a woman, she is also expected to have a reproductive function; bearing children for the community. This seems to be one additional reason for entrapping Niki. Ominously, as the woman is taken away, ill with an apparently unviable pregnancy at the end of the film, the spectator is not sure that she will return. What kind of medical care can there be in this village? Even if there were adequate medical care (unlikely since the villager diagnoses her by sniffing her), it must be doubted that the village association will expend any extraordinary means or expense on the behalf of its inhabitants. The villagers' indifference to the woman as a singular individual with a specific value is also obvious in her plight after Niki has tied her up, expecting that of course the villagers will acquiesce to his demands in order to protect her. Although the woman, as well as Niki, is in danger of dying from lack of water the collective holds its ground. Their "communal" needs or, more accurately, the needs of production efface any individual ones. Individual villagers are expendable. The need for productive labor that produces capital as well as profit supersedes all humanitarian concerns. Moreover, if indeed one of her primary productive functions for the village is reproductive, then her failure to produce a baby without hardship may make her dispensable. (Bringing to mind the wartime slogan exhorting women to go forth and multiply, that is, to birth children in support of Japanese imperialism.) The woman's troubled (possibly ectopic) pregnancy literally reveals her as un-reproductive, while it symbolically signals a non-progressive future for the village. The spectator wonders, what value can sustaining her life have once her (re)productive function for the villagers is nullified?

Here, the woman perfectly mirrors the notion of the "people" in some revised discourses on Japanese community and convention. Many concurred that the "fault" for fascism and Japanese imperialism lay almost completely in the imperial system and the state-government propagated ideology, or ideology from above – Irokawa Daikichi's defense of traditional folk-customs and popular belief systems is one example.[34] In many of these critiques the "people" were exculpated of blame for fascism and were portrayed and conceived of, as many historians have pointed out, as pure victims of the war (in disavowal of their doubled role as aggressors, an issue Abe foregrounds in his essay on the desert.)[35] But, as the shared gaze between the woman and the watching villagers makes clear, *she is not innocent*.

Still, she is coded as blameless, and her position as victimizer obscured by the dominant perception of her as victim.

It is important to also be aware that the radical transformation of Niki from prisoner to member of the community is not into the "democratic individual" called for by postwar intellectuals. There is no democracy whatsoever in this setting. Individualism is not permitted. Power is absolute. And submission of the individual to the needs of the community is demanded with dire punishment for non-compliance. Niki's attempt at rebellion is simply quashed by their absolute law: No work, no water. It is, however, only when Niki is a newcomer to the village that such overtly punitive measures are necessary. The existing population is already thoroughly subjugated to the village order through ideology.

> What is really in question in this mechanism of the mirror recognition of the Subject and of the individuals interpellated as subjects, and of the guarantee given by the Subject to the subjects if they freely accept their subjection to the Subject's "commandments"? The reality in question in this mechanism, the reality which is necessarily *ignored* (*méconnue*) in the very forms of recognition (ideology = misrecognition/ignorance) is indeed, in the last resort, the reproduction of the relations of production and of the relations deriving from them.[36]

Evident not only in her total acceptance of the relations of production and the relations deriving from them, the woman's thorough ideological indoctrination is also evident in the occasional slogans that she repeats facilely and without hesitation. For example, in response to Niki's question about why she stays in the village she replies, "love of homeland." This achieves perfectly the sort of alienation effect regarded by Brecht as the means (in theater and art) to elevate to a conscious level what would otherwise remain unconscious. By employing various devices to render strange the familiar, the given, and the putatively natural, the spectator loses identification with the character and instead is compelled to think about the representation in social or historical context. Ideally, held Brecht, this alienation effect should "demonstrate a custom which leads to conclusions about the entire structure of a society at a particular (transient) time."[37] The slogan "love of homeland" and others that the woman intones are deeply and uncomfortably familiar, evocative of those employed intentionally by the Japanese government prior to and during the Second World War and thus linked to fascism. Moreover, the transposition of such slogans to the hole in the sand that comprises the woman's home makes the notions simply ludicrous. What is there to love about this place? There is, objectively, nothing. "Love of homeland" is disclosed as an ideological manipulation for the benefit of populace docility. Thus, the village's ultimate tool by which individuals are controlled is ideological indoctrination (ignorance) and subject interpellation through a sense of community.

In addition, as noted previously, the village association profits through corrupt practices. The salty sand that is collected from the laboring villagers is sold to a construction company that illegally mixes it into its concrete. This jeopardizes the structures that the company builds and thus also people's lives and livelihoods connected with those structures. But when Niki raises the ethical question, the woman simply answers, "That's other people's business." When he unexpectedly acquiesces to this way of looking at it, by saying, "I guess it is," it is apparent that the ideological indoctrination has already transformed Niki. He is well on his way to becoming "one of them." This particularized ethics, or sense of "us," evokes wartime mass ideology that, by identifying being-as-belonging to one specific community only, was able to have unconcern (or worse, brutality) for the fate of all others. This is an ethics of community in which the other is cut off from any ethical consideration. That Pollack calls this attitude "provincial" suggests its boundedness to geography as dictating, in part, notions of belongingness.[38] The woman regularly marks this distinction, dressed in conventional Japanese garments while commenting on the difference between Niki's place of "origin," that is, Tokyo, and her community. She is, moreover, further bound to her place of origin because, as she states, she must attend to the graves of her deceased husband and child, borrowing the relational, spatial, and ancestral logic of the *furusato*.

> The interpellation of "individuals" as subjects; their subjection to the Subject; the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself; the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen – "So be it."
>
> Result: caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee, the subjects "work," they "work by themselves" in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the "bad subjects" who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus.[39]

Niki is transformed from a "bad subject" subject to repressive intervention at the hands of the State apparatus (here, the village association) to a subject of the State (village) who willingly works for himself for the good of the State (village) – as the result of recognition of the other subject(s) (primarily the woman, but also the villagers hardships in general) and thus finally of himself. And, once Niki acquiesces that the corrupted sand is "other people's business," he is now filled by community. And it is a community that is breathtakingly unethical beyond its particularized confines.

The village's lack of ethics and the troping of the woman as victim are also evident in the villager's response and Niki's counter-response to his

request for the special "privilege" of being allowed to see the ocean now and again. The villager promises to look into the matter – that is, to bring it up communally. The answer comes: they have a deal if Niki performs sexually for the community with the woman. Niki accordingly attempts to rape the woman when she refuses to willingly perform public sex with him. The dehumanizing, exploitative side to "community spirit" is ruthlessly exposed in the rape scene. Most commentators seemed to find the scene the most disturbing and bizarre moment of the film. It led Okuno to write, "This was the only scene in the movie that didn't fit (*ishitsu de aru*). It was disjunctive (*uite iru*) with the film as a whole."[40]

The following chapter analyzes the rape scene in more detail, but here I want to simply claim that Niki's attempt to rape the woman he supposedly loves, in exchange for trips to the ocean, is evidence of his *full* conversion, or *total* indoctrination/interpellation into village mentality. In the rape scene, the captive-Niki becomes the rapist-aggressor of the woman who is part of the community that enslaves him. His docility to the community is evidenced by and through his brutality to the woman with whom he is "supposed" to have found intimacy. Although his attempt to rape her fails, it has performatively served its purpose. Niki is now one of them. Thus, the sequence suggests that the villagers needn't worry about leaving behind the rope ladder when they have removed the woman for medical reasons in the following, concluding segment of the film. Possibly, it is not simply that they forget it in their haste to rush the woman to medical care. To keep Niki against his will, they understand, is no longer necessary. The "bad subject" has become the docile subject who "works by himself," even commits acts of (gendered) brutality against others for the community.

One beautiful irony of the film is the almost complete isolation that Niki and the woman experience as members of this community. All the rhetoric of community aside, there are very few occasions when there is actual interaction. The neighbors to whom the woman is so obligated are invisible except for the men who come to collect the sand, who chase Niki when he tries to escape, and in the rape scene. Other than the relationship that develops between Niki and the woman (as co-laboring husband and wife), the independent workers seem to have social relations only with the village association and do not enter into relations with each other, mirroring the circumstances of the laborer incorporated into capital described by Marx.[41] Moreover, the film denaturalizes human relational networks and returns them to the domain of serving the needs of capital. Niki and the woman come together in (exploitative) labor. And to reiterate, in *Woman in the Dunes*, it is not Japan the nation-state and its community of "all homogeneous Japanese" but the provincial village-of-the-same that is ethically exclusive of the other.

In *Woman in the Dunes*, in spite of the use of the desert as a location, the potential for praxis in the form of a shift from a purely empirical subject to a non-particularized, subjective experience of the mediation of the

other/Other in the self is never realized. Instead, as in Watsuji's theory, environment controls the community and dictates the type of society and culture that the people of the community produce. Even more troubling is the iconoclastic disregard for all others extraneous to the identified group of the same or *nakama*. This is radically *unlike* Abe's utopian desert, in which there is an opening to the Other and to the contradictions of the subject in its very plasticity. In the village in the dunes, the environment of sand (*qua* capital) and the needs of the village association shape villagers' lives. The sand is not an open field that gives itself to a different sort of transformation.

Pollack argued that the book designates institution as at fault and exonerates the people.[42] In the film, at least, I read it as precisely the opposite. The blame for the repressive, feudalistic, and exploitative system cannot be laid at the hands of some outside manipulating bureaucrat or governmental force. It is the fault of the villagers themselves, from the collective above to the laborers below, mired as they are in their *kyōdōtai* mentality, the ideologies of "love of homeland," "*tanin no koto* (that's other people's business)," "relationality," and "obligation to community (*giri*)." This mentality is what produces the violence, the exploitation, the annihilation of the other and, potentially, lays the groundwork for fertile conditions for fascism.

Accordingly, I think that the dominant disavowal of Abe-Teshigahara's film as constituting any domestic commentary stems precisely from the film's harsh, unflinching critique of then-reviving Japanism. To come to terms with this aspect of the film would amount to, as Abe explains in his "The idea of the desert," a spectatorship that understands both the politics of colonialization and imperialism. It also leads the spectator toward a grappling with a dynamics of subjectivity in terms of the necessary recognition of both terms that Sakai has called *shutai/shukan*. But as the interpretations of the woman's actions, both by Niki and overwhelmingly by the critics, suggest instead, both she and the film in general are received with a sort of blindness. As Abe put it in "The idea of the desert," how can they recognize her to be Bortak (angry, desirous, vengeful native) when they have never seen her as Walter (colonizer, imperialist, victimizer) by nature of her successful interpellation as a subject (and yet also victim) of the village community?

Finally, Niki's imprisonment and the assault of the village logic on his grasp of reality (or the state of the situation), moreover, is clearly an event (or series of events) that throws Niki "out of joint." Every "truth" he has known is destabilized. However, in the end, because of the *named* particularity of the village that replaces any possibly unsymbolizable, unnamable Real (or "Truth"), Niki's transformation constitutes what Badiou would call "fidelity to the simulacrum." "Fidelity to a simulacrum, unlike fidelity to an event, regulates its break with the situation not by the universality of the void, but by the closed particularity of an abstract set [*ensemble*] (the 'Germans' or the 'Aryans')."[43] Or, what for Lacan would be the Sadean ethics of the pervert.[44]

7 Technologies of gazing[1]

> *Woman in the Dunes*. The protagonist (*shujinkō*) of the book (*shōsetsu*) is the 1/8-millimeter sand but the protagonist of the film is the woman. My gaze was drawn to the close-up of the figure of the woman-as-female-prototype (*genshitsuka sareta*); the sand receded far off into the background.
>
> Okuno Takeo

> Ever since Laura Mulvey's landmark article of feminist film theory, the image of the woman in mainstream commercial cinema has been understood as a contradictory textual disturbance which each film must work to resolve. The female figure, always and inevitably defined in terms of sexuality, is seen as the structural mainspring – the very site of desire – of conventional cinematic narrative. According to the lines traced out by Mulvey, the resolution of this crisis evoked by the woman's image is most often achieved in one of two ways – ways that outline the available representations for the woman in dominant cinema: The female figure is either fetishized in the luminous isolation of an objectifying image, or made subject to the abusive mastery of some form of sadistic domination through the narrative.
>
> Sandy Flitterman-Lewis[2]

This final, short chapter on *Woman in the Dunes* attends to a gendered analysis of the relation to the other as represented in the aesthetic and structural functions of the woman in the film. I will show how, alongside its critique of Japanism and pro-nativist, essentialist notions of subjectivity and community, the film incorporates a complex citation of developing codes of violent, homosocial filmic gazing in order to subvert those visual technologies.

As my epigraphs should suggest, this chapter analyzes the problematic of the "textual disturbance" posited by the erotic image of the woman-as-protagonist in *Woman in the Dunes*. I read the filmic images against a concurrent revolution in Japanese cinematic portrayals of women and sex in both mainstream and alternative movies. As I will describe, for the first time in Japanese cinema in the mid-1960s, female nudity and portrayals of sex had become integral to most Japanese films. Not only pornography, "pink

films" and *Nikkatsu roman poruno*, but mainstream cinema as well had begun to depend on male domination of women for eroticism.

At first glance faithful to this "idiom" of cinematic eroticism, *Woman in the Dunes* incorporates many of the developing technologies of erotic gazing: female nudity as spectacle, a bound and gagged woman, and a rape of a woman. However, I argue that in fact *Woman in the Dunes* constitutes a resistance to the developing sadistic mode of resolution to the problematic of the woman as textual disturbance, because it incorporates that mode in a distorted and idiosyncratic form.[3] In addition, I also claim that the fetishization of the female figure – the other (often copresent) resolution to the disturbance she poses – is one that, like the citation of sadistic codes, is distorted in such a manner as to problematize, rather than simply reiterate, the resolution-by-fetish. I show how the film ultimately defies conventionally gendered spectatorial expectations of its era by, in part, presenting a non-phallic centered eroticism severed from male domination. In fact, I argue that the eroticism of this film is largely achieved through an alternate, decentralized ("feminine") sexual economy that also resolutely eroticizes the male body, hence placing the male body in the position of spectacle. I also suggest that because the erotic spectacle of the woman is tempered by an aesthetic distance, or "disinterestedness," it is different from the then more conventional use of female bodies to incite sexual interest.

Regardless of authorial intent, *Woman in the Dunes* in this sense can be hailed as a feminist intervention *in effect* that goes further than the more common "pro-women" replication of codes in putative sympathy for women's sociocultural subordination. (For example, movies that depict heterosexual rape scenes in apparent sympathy for the female victim sometimes simultaneously shoot the victim's body in such a way as to eroticize that rape.) Let me note up front that my interpretation of the film does not unproblematically endorse 1970s feminist film critique, but seeks to borrow from it some terms of engagement with the female figure as spectacle and as the object of sexual violence that are particularly appropriate to a 1960s-era film.[4] It was, after all, a response to the flood of movies that eroticized domination of women in explicit images that gave rise to early feminist responses such as those by Mulvey or Molly Haskell, who wrote:

> the ten years from, say 1962 or 1963 to 1973 have been the most disheartening in screen history . . . Directors who in 1962 were guilty only of covert misogyny (Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita*) or kindly indifferent (Sam Peckinpah's *Ride the High Country*) became overt in 1972 with the violent abuse and brutalization of *A Clockwork Orange* and *Straw Dogs*. The growing strength and demands of women in real life; spearheaded by women's liberation, obviously provoked a backlash in commercial film.[5]

Whether it was clearly a "backlash" against a rise in women's status in Japan or the United States of America is uncertain, but this much is clear:

in both national cinemas depictions of sexual brutality against women rose manyfold.

Let me begin my analysis with a description of the only full nude shot of the woman. Niki awakens after his first night in the pit. A short montage sequence linking images through dissolves approximates his gradual return to consciousness. The spectator sees sand flows and patterns dissolve into the ribs of the umbrella that is hung over Niki, and finally, the woman's body. She is naked. Lit from behind, shot from the side approximating Niki's subjective view, details of her body facing the camera are obscured by darkness. The curves of her breast, stomach and hip, and the depressions in between are coated with a fine dusting of sand. Her body graphically reminds the spectator of the hills and valleys of the sand dunes just seen in the montage sequence. There is a cut and the camera quickly pans her a second time. Here, I find a resonance between Mishima Yukio's assessment of Kawabata and the camera gaze in *Woman in the Dunes*: the camera looks at people as if they were objects.[6] Or more accurately, it should be gendered. The camera looks at the woman as if she were an object. She sleeps, unaware of Niki's/spectatorial gaze, her face covered with a thin cloth. As Okuno remarked, "the parts that are conventionally hidden are naked, and to the contrary, the face, normally exposed, is hidden. This in general transforms her [from an individual] into a universal (*fuhenteki*) woman."[7] Her "individuality" or subjectivity itself is in these shots obscured. Instead, there is only her body to be perused with no reciprocity of gaze, her nakedness aesthetically offered up as spectacle.

On first glance, the simple explanation is: this is precisely the employment of female bodies as erotic spectacle that also halts the film narrative, and thus functions just as feminists such as Mulvey and E. Ann Kaplan might have described it in the 1970s and 1980s, and as Flitterman-Lewis summarized it (quoted above), as a "spectacle" that interrupts the diegesis in much the same formal or structural manner that the Brechtian pause does. Mulvey put it this way, "the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation."[8] It is important to remember, as Haskel asserted years ago, that any filmic representation of a nude woman or a woman undressing is in modern (or contemporary) North America and Western Europe (and I add, in Japan) first and foremost always read in terms of a judgment of its sexual appeal.[9] However, in *Woman in the Dunes*, the shot of the naked woman, although its thematic function cannot be equated with a politically inspired Brechtian one, is not simply "spectacle." There is a supplementary interpretation of the function of the eroticized woman in *Woman in the Dunes* that emerges out of a more careful reading of the film in its immediate cinematic context. Rather than a halting of the narrative for a purely aesthetic or erotic function, this employment of the woman's body is simultaneously precisely the citation of (and hence

commentary on) the specific, developing, visual economy of woman as erotic object in filmic representation. In order to show how *Woman in the Dunes* deviates from the developing conventions, I elaborate below in some detail the sex and erotic film "boom" context in which this nude shot was produced and consumed.

Actually, the full nude shot of the woman – as tame and reserved as it might appear to today's spectator's gaze – was quite innovative and daring for the times. The 1960s marked the first mainstream and legal Japanese filmic portrayals of female nudity. Previously, female nudity in films was restricted to, according to Satō Tadao, pre-occupation pornographic films called "blue films." Illegal, they were shot and traded on a black market, and often confiscated in police raids. Commercial films were subject to careful and strict censorship that disallowed portrayals of kissing, or of naked female bodies, genitals of either sex, and sexual intercourse. With the lifting of wartime censorship of all kinds (aimed, undoubtedly, at political censorship first and foremost) came the beginning, tentative gestures toward portrayals of sex (and kissing) and nudity in Japanese films. These beginnings can be broken down into two primary trajectories: the incorporation of naked female bodies in non-sexual contexts in experimental films and the incorporation of heterosexual sex into dramas. Some experimental films deployed women's nudity as a sort of spectacle, divorced from depictions of sex. A few filmmakers, such as Mizoguchi Kenji, incorporated heterosexual sex into plot without radical deviation from the type of drama he had shot in the prewar.[10] However, this second trajectory, or sex in the context of narrative film, was from the beginning dominated by radical, new types of film marked by violence and the portrayals of degenerate characters, typical of the so-called *taiyozoku* film series in which Imamura Shōhei figures prominently as a forerunner.[11] These tales of "angry youth" leaned toward realism of a gritty nature, actually thematically resembling the prewar *shishōsetsu* – a personal, confessional narrative offshoot genre of naturalism combined with Zolaism by writers like Kamura Isota. Overwhelmingly, (heterosexual) sex is depicted without then-conventional notions of romance or beauty, but animalistically and often with brutality and sadism toward the woman.[12] This trajectory, of course, was also true of 1960s American films, as Haskell noted in her *From Reverence to Rape*, accompanying the relative rise in women's economic status, independence, and feminist demands.

Also, by 1964 Wakamatsu Kōji had begun his series of political, sometimes experimental, yet predominantly violent soft-pornographic films bringing together the two early trajectories.[13] The so-called pink film ascended in the mid-1960s, far eclipsing non-erotic dramas in sales and audience attendance. The result was that by the 1970s many of the most interesting and talented filmmakers were producing dramas mixed with soft-core sex-as-spectacle in what is known as *Nikkatsu roman poruno.* Many of these employed violent sex-spectacles in conscious and deliberate commentary on the genre itself.

Japanese film journals in the 1960s were quick to reproduce the idiom of the naked woman as erotic spectacle. In the late 1950s when both *Eiga geijutsu* and *Kinema junpō* fêted famous actors and actresses as well as "sexy" unknown starlets with photo spreads – mostly photographic reproductions of movie stills – there was no nudity. Women were posed in alluring postures, but dressed in bathing suits (often bikinis), and men and women kissing or in other clinches were also clothed.[14] In the early 1960s, however, these discrete photo spreads were replaced with increasingly bold ones. At roughly the time when *Eiga geijutsu* changed the dating of the journal on its spine from the Japanese system to the Western one (that is, from Showa 39 to 1964, for example), special issues on erotic topics abounded. One sample issue from *Eiga geijutsu's* "Cinema Erotisism" [*sic*] series combined some 30 pages of photos with short essays on film erotics. Now, bathing-suit clad beauties were replaced by full nude shots (with only the genitals and pubic hair discretely censored).[15] In full color and in black and white reproductions, overwhelmingly white, European and American naked women frolicked on beaches and in pools, reclined on couches, smiled enticingly, perched on stools. Naked and clothed men (occasionally other naked women) embraced these naked women. Unlike women's bodies, in these sections male bodies, whether clothed or unclothed, do not appear by themselves; they function as "props" for the display of female sexuality and nudity. Occasionally the naked women appeared bound in chains or other bondage, ripe for abuse of various kinds. Issue after issue devoted special sections to film erotica, usually text dwarfed by photo spreads like the ones I have just described. There is, moreover, in the written commentaries no attempt to disavow the overtly pornographic intent of these (to the contemporary gaze) relatively modest pictorials – they are not coded as "art."[16] Repeatedly, the naked female bodies and sex scenes in these "sexy" films are evaluated according to their success in stoking (male) sexual excitement.[17]

This sort of critique sometimes spilled over into narrative films, rather than purely erotic cinema. The director Kimura Keigo commented that he found nothing erotic in Kishida's portrayal of the woman in the dunes, attributing this absence of fleshly turn-on to her racial lack of confidence or pride in her physicality and inability to kiss convincingly. (Kissing being a Western import, he continues, Japanese need about a hundred years to bring film kisses up to par with Western counterparts.)[18] The at that time more theoretical journal *Kinema junpō* followed *Eiga geijutsu's* lead by publishing a special issue of film erotica in 1964. It also comprised some 30 pages of photo spreads ranging from women in bathing suits to full-color, full-page blow-ups of nude white women in alluring poses, followed by a shorter section of essays.

Gathered together under the title of "Waga nikutai eiga ron" (loosely, "Essays on Japanese flesh-films"),[19] the *Eiga geijutsu* special issue included a compilation of short essays by an impressive sampling of some very important filmmakers of the time (such as Imai Tadashi, Shinoda Masahiro,

Suzuki Seijun, Terayama Shūji), as well as scriptwriters and others in the film industry, written in response to questions given the essayists by the journal including: (1) What do you think about the depictions of the body (*nikutai*) in (Japanese) movies to date? (2) What sort of women should be portrayed? (3) Could you comment on "what is woman" (*onna to wa nanika ni tsuite*)?[20] Many respondents compared the putative eroticism of *Woman in the Dunes* and Imamura's *Nippon konchūki* (known as *The Insect Woman* in English; literally, *Japanese insect chronicle*). Either the journal dubbed both "flesh-films" (*nikutai eiga*) or maybe a majority of the respondents put the films together on their own.[21] Toita Michizō's confused rumination on the incorporation of "erotics" into the film *Woman in the Dunes* attests to the controversy surrounding the novelty of sex in the movies, "I don't really understand why this sort of depiction of eroticism was necessary in *Woman in the Dunes*. I suspect that perhaps it was because *Woman in the Dunes*'s entire conception is metaphoric, and thus it was intended to contribute by emphasizing the sensual."[22] It was in this context, of a sex and erotic film and film commentary boom gearing up toward full swing, that *Woman in the Dunes* was released.

As noted in the Introduction, *Woman in the Dunes* incorporates many of the developing technologies of erotic gazing. Thus, like Wakamatsu's experimental pornography, it brings together the two trajectories identified above. Looking again at the "landscape" shot of the naked woman in *Woman in the Dunes*, this shot evokes the earliest, experimental films that placed nude women's bodies into non-erotic contexts. She is undoubtedly eroticized here as a spectacle, but her function is quite unlike that of female nudity in Imamura's rape scenes, or Wakamatsu's violent explorations of human sexuality interlinked to politics. The woman is here to be looked at, but not touched. She is eroticized as aesthetic object, in keeping with a sort of disinterested sensualism that halts narrative to display spectacle for the consumption by the gaze. Against spectator expectation, Niki does not seem to respond to her with prurient desire. He watches from a distance, hesitant to interact in any manner, attempting to take his leave without awakening her. The camera refrains from a subjective portrayal of a repeating, sexualized gaze. It maintains distance. For the spectator, she is like an artwork that awakens a *hint* of desire – because the insistent physicality of the image renders disinterestedness slightly impure.[23] Like the sand, the woman becomes sensuous landscape – made the object of our sensate-aesthetic perusal.

Surprisingly, however, on careful examination, the spectator will discover that in *Woman in the Dunes*, other than the single, fully-nude scene of the woman sleeping, nudity is mostly confined to shots of *Niki*'s body. One sees specifically his back, side, buttocks, and legs when he is being washed or fondled. These are all body parts exempt from prior censorship. Even the buttocks, when they belong to a man, are culturally deemed non-erotic in many contexts, and are publicly displayed in anterior, contemporaneous, and posterior films, television, in sumo wrestling *fundoshi* (loincloths),

certain public festivals and baths, and other putatively non-sexual contexts. The erotics of this celebrated erotic film are thus achieved, in large part, through the eroticization of these male so-called non-sexualized body parts. This sexualization, or eroticization, depends on how the woman touches Niki, and how the camera depicts that touch. As Okuno put it, *Woman in the Dunes* "had more verisimilitude than a pornographic film (*ero eiga*), didn't it? She [Kishida] wonderfully expressed the natural desire of a woman living alone, bereaved of her husband."[24]

When the woman is washing Niki, the slow tracking of the camera matches the slow movements of her hands over his body. Throughout the film close-ups are extreme enough to reveal the grains of sand clinging to chins, shoulders, arms, throats, sometimes in the slow panning up Niki's or the woman's body, or following the sweep of her long black hair trailing into sand. The viewer feels the mingle of sweat and sand and hears the gritty trickling sound of sand being brushed from those sweaty bodies. Repeatedly the spectator is treated to stunning visuals: broad contours lit starkly to mark the sketching of outlines, and obscuring the filling in of content, or conversely, minute, lavish attention to skin on the arms or Niki's legs. Importantly, the camera does not focus its dominant attention on conventionally sexy parts of the woman's body like her breasts or lips, nor is there a capitulation to Japanese conventional substitute fetish objects such as feet and ankles or the nape of the neck. Offered to scopophilic perusal are the public, less commonly fetishized body parts of both Niki and the woman: hair trailing into sand, fingers, the shoulders and back, the throat, the calf of the leg. Of course, any body part on a woman can be fetishized, but by *not* focusing on conventionally erotic female body parts, the camera appears incognizant, almost naïve of their developing primacy as stand-in for spectatorial object(s) of desire. The skillful manner in which they are unseen (as if, again, the camera were unaware) does not – I believe – stoke desire to see more. Instead, the spectator is lost in what *is* offered as spectacle, most often, to reiterate, the eroticized (conventionally non-sexualized) parts of both the male and female bodies. The film *feels* tactile, visceral. The slow pace, the deliberate camera pans, the focus on the minute details – all impart to the viewer the sensation of experience.

This experience is both immediate and disinterested because, at the same time as the spectator imagines that he or she feels and hears what is depicted, the situation is unreal, unbelievable, and so she is at the same time distanced. She knows that this is a movie but she may swoon to its eroticized beauty. Forgetting time momentarily, the spectator colludes with the camera gaze to halt to watch the sand settle, the bodies lift and breathe, the slow fingers probing flesh, caught in a body-scape, a sand-scape, an environment given over to spectatorial perusal out of time, apparently without other purpose, just to be gazed at. At the same time, one could conversely argue instead that *everything* is eroticized – including the sand. From this perspective, sexuality is thoroughly decentralized. Even *environment* is shot

in a manner as sensual as the bodies. The eroticism here reminds me of Hélène Cixous's notion of feminine sexuality, in her proclamation,

> endless body, without "end," without principal "parts": if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are wholes, not simple partial objects but varied entirety, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros never stops traveling, vast astral space . . . she doesn't create a monarchy of her body or her desire. Let masculine sexuality gravitate around the penis, engendering this centralized body (political economy) under the party dictatorship.[25]

One could also call this a visual economy of erotic gazing that transcends the pornographic in favor of a higher second nature, in which the woman's body is simultaneously decentered as spectacle and spectacularized-as-landscape to be viewed with disinterest. This specific technology of gazing is, however, only one of several that combine to constitute what I am calling a "distortion" of 1960s Japanese film erotics. And it is made more evident in the "bondage" scene.

The bondage scene begins with a closed-frame, long take that follows Niki's movements as he pounces on the woman and gags her with a hand towel. Pulling a second towel from where she keeps it tucked in her waistband, he binds her hands behind her. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up, very dimly lit, as his hands knot the towel. The subsequent cut shows Niki's hands wrapping up his belongings into a rucksack, as he cajoles her to "Bear with this for a little while," assuring her it is only a temporary inconvenience, one that she must take some responsibility for, after all. Human beings, he holds forth, are not dogs. The camera follows Niki as he helps himself to food, eats, and talks to her. She remains out of camera range until there is a cut to a medium close-up of her face in the shadows, mouth and nose obscured by the towel as she watches him packing and eating.

Regarding this scene, Teshigahara's contemporary, director Shibuya Minoru commented, "The most interesting part of *Woman in the Dunes*, was when, trying to escape, [Niki] ties up the woman and bolts food down while standing [there with her bound]. I thought it was strange that he just went about doing ordinary things (*nichijoteki na dandori ga deteiru no wa okashii to omou*)."[26] Why did he find it so "strange"? What sort of "unordinary" activities were expected of Niki? Is it that the bound woman evokes a raw eroticism that signals pornography? Increasingly, the expectation of the viewer must be: a woman is being bound and gagged. Surely the man (alone with the bound woman) will strip her or touch her, or both. Surely he will demonstrate his sexual and/or physical dominance. But replicating the camera's incognizance of the woman-as-sexual-object described above, Niki does not remove her clothes to look at her. Nor does he touch her. Moreover, she hardly appears in this first scene (in which she is

bound). Niki binds her for purely strategic reasons of power severed from sexual dominance. He gags her so that she can no longer disseminate ideology. He ties her up so that she can no longer labor for the community. The real power struggle is between the individual (Niki) and the village collective, and the woman is little more than a pawn (an object of exchange) between them.

The villagers appear at the top of the pit, calling down wondering what's going on. They have come to collect the sand but there is no sand ready for collection. Niki grabs the sand collection bucket, hollering for them to quickly pull him up because the woman is tied up inside. The villagers respond by pulling him up halfway, then dropping him and walking away. Time passes. Niki ruminates. Rations – cheap liquor (*shōchū*) and cigarettes wrapped in newspaper – are delivered. Although the woman is there, still bound, but no longer gagged (it is not clear when he has removed her gag), sometimes visible in the background, *she is not the focus of the footage*. The camera follows *Niki* as he smokes, tastes the *shōchū*, talks. There is a cut to her when he addresses her and when she answers, but overall she is in general ignored.

It is after this that the ironic employment of sexed codes for their dismantling rather than reiteration becomes most obvious. Suddenly the woman, curled up on the floor, begins to writhe and moan. It is at first a spectacle of a woman made helpless in the private company of a man. The full shot of her wiggling body, her moaning voice hint at the erotic, but Niki responds by asking her if she is thirsty. She answers "no," and to the spectator and Niki's astonishment, asks him to "scratch behind my left ear." The ordinariness and silliness of this breaks the build-up of tension toward eroticism. It is the "ordinariness" that Shibuya found "strange (*okashii*)."[27] Instead of "expected" acts of his sexual dominance the camera adjusts slightly as Niki walks over to her, his legs partially blocking her from the spectator, and with a delicate, reserved finger, scratches behind her ear, his upper body out of frame. Brilliantly, all the spectatorial tensions built toward an expectation of the erotic signaled by her bound, writhing, moaning body are dispelled into laughter (or at least surprise). The touch here is thoroughly de-eroticized and turned into parodic citation.

Thus, unlike Imamura or Watsuji or other Abe–Teshigahara contemporaries, *Woman in the Dunes* demarcates issues of power and domination/subordination from depictions of sex and from erotic gazing. The film compartmentalizes them as copresent technologies of human relations or social networks, but not thoughtlessly intertwined in the set pattern of male sadistic domination of women = eroticism. Certainly questions of domination and submission inform the sexual relationship between the woman and Niki, but the eroticism of the film is not indebted to depictions of male sexual domination of women. (And the fluidity of "power" in some ways evokes Abe's essay on the desert.) But how then, one might ask, can the rape scene be interpreted? The scene that, as already noted, the

critics were overwhelmingly uncomfortable with. I have already argued that the rape scene functions as an indicator of Niki's full indoctrination-interpellation into village ethics and ideology as a subject. But it also cites the developing trope of rape as the favorite erotic filmic representation of sexual relations.

The rape scene is introduced when, in response to Niki's query whether the community has decided if he will be allowed to see the ocean (under supervision), a village spokesperson, looking down at Niki from the edge of the pit, shot in alternating extreme high and low angles approximating the two point-of-view positions, announces, "I've discussed your request with the others, and we've decided its okay if you two do it (*are*)." Niki looks quizzical. The villager repeats, "The two of you, you know, out here in front of everyone watching, *it*, with your wife." As Niki slowly figures out what they mean by "it" the villager expounds, "couple like dogs – like a stud and a bitch (*osu to mesu*) – do it." At this point, the village spokesman, who, the viewer would surmise, is alone from the visual and auditory information so far, is suddenly joined by two villagers who abruptly stand up into the camera frame to both his left and right. (Reminiscent of the spectator's sudden understanding of *nakama* in Niki's first interaction with the villagers on the beach.) The one to screen right wears mask-like goggles and he adds, "You know, this (*kore da yo*)," accompanied by a vulgar hand motion simulating sexual intercourse. Raucous laughter breaks out among the villagers whose number grows steadily in subsequent shots that alternate between Niki's and the villagers' subjective reactions. Like the prurient spectators of pornographic film, the villagers gather in a gross voyeurism. In the darkness of night (like the darkness of the movie theater), Niki is suddenly illuminated by a light shone down on him by a villager's flashlight. Torches flare above. Flashlights wave down in circular, circulating spotlights as a loud, booming drum beat fills the soundtrack. Accompanied by the rhythmic boom of the drum throughout the scene, the villagers, both men and women, some in frightening masks and costumes reminiscent of traditional festival-wear, hoot, whistle, holler, and laugh, some calling "do it, do it," as they prepare to enjoy the spectacle. In and out of the moving spotlights, shots of villagers alternate with ones of Niki, mostly either long point of views or medium close-ups, first in contemplation of their "request" and then of Niki and the woman struggling as he drags her out of the house in an attempt to rape her when she refuses to perform willingly. She successfully fights him off. In the end, an exhausted Niki collapses beside the woman, who strikes him repeatedly in rage. As suddenly as the drumbeats began, they cease. A villager rises at the pit's edge and, in disappointment, flings a handful of sand down upon the collapsed couple. A cut to an extreme close-up of a crow in flight, making a vivid contrast between captive and freedom, announces the end of the scene.

Unlike the so-called erotic, or *nikutai*, Japanese films of the time, which so often aimed at spectator titillation through the abuse of women,

in *Woman in the Dunes* spectatorial pleasure is ruined. Brutality is simply brutality; it does not become sexy. The villagers, egging on Niki's attempt to impose himself on her, appear grotesque – like animals. Dressed in festival-type outfits, beating drums, they also uncomfortably evoke traditional "Japanese culture," reminiscient of ancient ritual and festival celebrations. But here they are celebrating (an attempted) male abuse of power that uses sex and the female body against her will as entertainment for the villagers at large. Most importantly, *in the rape scene there is no female nudity, no camera focus on eroticized body parts, no close-ups to titillate*. This footage is thus markedly unlike the deeply eroticized shots that portray their first sexual encounter or the woman and Niki's bodies elsewhere. *The rape is not eroticized.* It is not even Niki's desire for domination over the woman that drives him to attack her; it is the further exploitation of the woman by Niki in the face of his own submission to the interests of the village (interpellation as subject). In *Woman in the Dunes* rape does not degenerate into the eroticized spectacle for viewer-pleasure that it was increasingly becoming in contemporaneous Japanese films. And of course, the attempt at rape fails. Niki gives up and the villagers withdraw. Hence, there is no sexy climax.

Sex, when it happens between Niki and the woman, follows not an assault by the man, but a power struggle in which the *woman* emerges (at least temporarily) as victorious. Although this power struggle includes binding the woman, as noted above, the binding, like the rape itself, is *not* eroticized. Shortly after Niki releases the woman from her bonds, they struggle physically as she attempts to prevent him from ripping down her house to fashion himself a ladder from the wood of the walls. A frightening cascade of sand interrupts their battle and throws Niki and the woman into intimate proximity.

The struggle is captured in a long take with only a few seamless cuts on action, the synthesized sound track whining in high pitch, gong-like punctuations well-matched to character movement. Just after Niki pins the woman down, he realizes – signaled to the viewer by his shocked expression and gaze that guides the spectatorial gaze – that his hand lies on top of her naked breast, bared when her blouse came undone in the struggle (a naked breast that, however, the viewer cannot actually see). The camera cuts to her response shot; she is breathing heavily. It pans up to Niki's face. Both of them lie still for a moment, her chest heaving, and then a loud rumble announces the beginning of the sand avalanche. In first a long, then a full shot, Niki is depicted lying on top of her as if shielding her from the cascading sand. The position of the two, however, suggests the "missionary" sexual one, particularly because of how the woman's hand clutches his shoulder. The avalanche ends. Sitting up, they separate and the camera follows the woman as she rises, holding her blouse closed, and steps behind a curtain to wipe off the sand and reorder her clothing. Niki approaches and gently offers to help. She responds with hesitation, asking him, "But, aren't all the women in the city beautiful?" He responds, "Rubbish (*kudaranai*)," and

enters the frame in the foreground, partially obscuring the woman. This is where the sex scene proper begins. Okuno, who complained about his discomfort with standard "bed scenes" because of the unnatural (and obvious) manipulation of the viewer to prepare them for the shift toward the erotics of the scenes, lauded *Woman in the Dunes* because "there was no need for that sort of complicated manipulation of [the spectator's] state of mind. Even I was naturally engrossed in the sexual intercourse (*shizen ni boku mo seikō no naka ni haitte ita*). I only became conscious of it because the man and woman's embrace continued for a relatively long [time]."[28]

The extended sex scene is composed of mostly long takes with relatively seamless cuts ranging from medium to extreme close-ups alternating frontal, partial, and 3/4 back shots of the couple showing Niki brushing sand from her body. Eventually, they sink to the floor in an embrace. In most shots, Niki's arm partially fills the frame in the foreground as he, for example, pushes down her collar, revealing progressively more and more of her upper arm and her back. The sound track approximates the gritty trickle of sand, the woman's breathing is labored. The camera pans down her arm to her hand clutching his buttocks. His hand, brushing her skin, appears tender and gentle, without brutality or domination. In the absence of shots of bared sexy body parts such as breasts, what eroticizes the scene are her breathing, facial expressions, and grasping, groping hands kneading his back. (It must be admitted that the footage is most conventional in the treatment of, that is, the focus on the woman's facial expressions and the relative indifference to Niki's.) As groping turns to sexual intercourse, ambient sound gives way to soundtrack. A cut to flowing sand, then to a crow flying in the sky signals the end to the scene.

In conclusion, the depiction of power relations in *Woman in the Dunes* does not follow the developing model in which men dominate women, be it sexually or otherwise. It does, however, appear to acknowledge that power is an element integral to all human relations (Niki and the woman) and social networks (the couple and the villagers). And, in adamant rejection of many developing codes of homosocial filmic gazing, and in place of male sadistic domination of women that increasingly became the idiom of, or synonymous with, Japanese "film eroticism," *Woman in the Dunes* establishes its own technology of gazing. It offers a non-violent erotics that is disinterested and reserved, yet sensual and consensual, offering spectators the erotic treat of a decentralized (thus non-phallic centered) representation of heterosexual sexuality.[29]

Part III

Naming desire

Mishima Yukio and the politics of "sexuation"[1]

> If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society: not that desire is asocial; on the contrary. But it is explosive; there is no desiring-machine capable of being assembled without demolishing entire social sectors.
>
> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

> Modern Japanese aesthetics, homosociality, and fascism? You must do Mishima.
>
> Asada Akira[2]

Surely, as Asada's comment obviates, there is no other Japanese personage who more infamously stands at the nexus intertwining many of the themes of this book than Mishima Yukio (1925–70). A precocious youth, published in a literary journal at the age of 16, even his earliest works (romantically) bound ultimate aestheticism to (beautiful) death.[3] In 1946 Kawabata became his mentor.[4] Shortly thereafter his first major publication – *Confessions of a Mask* (*Kamen no kokuhaku*, 1949; hereafter *Confessions*) – complicated his previously "romantic" twist on death and aesthetics. Here, they were intertwined with an apparently wrenching exposé of his "innermost," avowedly perverse soul, desires, and fantasies: desire takes the form of a murderous, sadomasochistic (latent) homosexuality. Mishima's lifelong erotic fascination with a portrait of Saint Sebastian, bare-chested, bound, and pierced by arrows, makes its first appearance, as do fantasies starring sexy boys with masculine, muscular physiques. Overall, the economy of desire inscribed in the text is indebted to (sadistic) torture, sometimes murder and cannibalism, alternating with fantasies that trope the narrator-protagonist as the (masochistic) recipient of torture.[5]

Subsequent Mishima "texts" (including performances and other venues besides fiction) ranged widely. There were "shocking" portrayals of both

homosexual and heterosexual erotics often bound to a glorification of blood, brutality, murder and suicide. Psychological and philosophical explorations of love and (various) sexualities alternated with "ordinary" heterosexual romances. Commercially successful potboilers seemed to contradict deeply intellectual, emotionally distanced or disinterested treatments on aesthetics and historical myth. Mishima was also a prolific writer of social and literary criticism. He wrote a total of 40 long fictions, some 20 volumes of short fictions, 18 plays, and 20 more volumes of critical essays. Many of Mishima's major literary texts have appeared in English translation, making him one of the most internationally well known of the modern Japanese writers. On the covers of these translations appear excerpts from such venerable publications as *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*, proclaiming: "One of the outstanding writers of the world," "A writer of the first rank," "A modern masterpiece."[6] There is, of course, a huge body of critical work on Mishima in Japanese and, relative to commentary on other Japanese writers, quite a lot in English too, many studies being primarily biographical-literary ones.[7]

Mishima also authored film scripts and acted in films. He posed for photo shoots (some nude and decidedly erotic), including the series "Death of a Man" shot shortly before his actual suicide, in which Mishima not only posed as Saint Sebastian, but also with a sword in his abdomen, the photographer as Mishima's second, sword raised.[8] As a young man, Mishima resolutely rejected most things indexical of "traditional Japan."[9] Paradoxically, in the 1960s as Japan put the period of self-reflection and criticism over the Second World War behind and progressed toward a fully material, consumerist and Americanized society divested of imperial divinity and militarism, Mishima became affiliated with a neo-fascist, new right-wing movement calling for the resurrection and re-deification of the (de-reified, de-deified, humanized, war criminal) emperor. His "Theory on the defense of culture" ("Bunka bōei ron," 1968), which proclaimed the emperor to be the source of Japanese culture, was met with left-wing accusations pronouncing Mishima a fascist.[10] Mishima formed his own private "army" (The Shield Society or *Tate no kai*) in 1968, ostensibly as a remedy for Japanese de-militarization (symbolized by the effete self-defense corps).[11] Subsequently, Mishima's final public performance consisted of a pathetic attempt at a *coup d'état*, which he and his followers knew was doomed, but afforded him a platform for a final speech and his suicide by ritual disembowelment (*seppuku*).

Mishima has deeply troubled critics, including me. How, they (I) have pondered, should his (violent/perverse/homo) sexuality (as expressed in his various texts) be dealt with? Is it intrinsically related to his aesthetics? His politics? What does one make of his more "normal" romances? How can one theorize relation to the other through such a diverse corpus? Was Mishima "truly" a fascist? An enormous respect for his formidable intellect is tempered by his problematic politics. Liberal tolerance for (or more radical celebration of) homosexuality must confront his eventual embrace

of neo-fascism. Each of these critical arenas – politics, aesthetics, sexuality – are deeply complex, even contradictory, in Mishima's corpus.

It is for this reason that I have redefined the term "text" and even the proper noun "Mishima" in their usage here. This (somewhat maverick) redefinition follows the lead of Shimada Masahiko because I will rely on the notion of performance to include Mishima's fiction, poetry, expository writings, appearances in plays and movies, political activities, public appearances, photo shoots, private life-acts, and even his public suicide, all as texts. Together I call this a "performative bundle" that comprises the signifier that is Mishima Yukio. Shimada wrote:

> The coupling of the flesh of language (written things) with language of the flesh (the body of Mishima Yukio as text) (*sakuhin*); the coupling of the past with the present; the coupling of "I" as a perceptual and cognitive entity with "I" as a performer, or else "I" as guinea pig (*jikkendai*); the coupling of illusion with current reality; it is the mating of these various incongruous things that makes up the real, unmasked body (*shōtai*) of the texts (*sakuhin*) that gave rise to the multifarious imaginary that is Mishima Yukio.[12]

If one views Mishima's life-acts, discursive productions, and art-acts as an interrelated set of thoroughly (intentionally or not) contradictory *performances*, without seeking to discern which might have a more intrinsic or essential relationship to notions of "truth" or "veracity" (or to the "real" Mishima), I think an alternative reading becomes possible. That is, I pursue a reading of his corpus of texts (as I have just defined them) as constituting a gestalt rather than privileging some as disclosing the truth about Mishima, and dismissing others as subterfuge, sham, or farce. Hence, when I use the signifier "Mishima" I do not intend that it signify anything other than this gestalt, or performative bundle, and I sever it from the conventional assumptions that inhere in the notion of the author or even author-function. Questions that logically follow include: What is being performed, how, and why? I will argue that overwhelmingly what Mishima performed in these varied venues were (often hyperbolic or theatrical) reiterations of ways of textualizing/de-textualizing (materializing) desire and sexual/gender performances. The detailing of how and why is the content of the chapters on Mishima.

Here, I use the term gender performance as Judith Butler has defined it, as the (not generally conscious or intentional) reiteration of a set of gendered (mostly behavorial) norms that are appended to (both) biological sexes.[13] One "becomes" a man or a woman through the interplay between one's performances of gender and society's interpellations of one as a member of a particular sex, with its attendant norms of behavior, attitudes, attire, and so forth. Gender performance itself is not theatrical – it is simply the replication of what is assumed to be "normal" for a girl or a boy.

The conscious usurption of these gendered social codes in ways that make obvious, or even merely hint at the (political, sociocultural, historical) *constructivity* of the codes is, then, what I am calling *theatrical performativity*. This is one of the radical effects of drag, as Butler has shown. But the theatrical performance of straight masculinity by gay men or even, in certain contexts, simply masculinity performed by any (even straight) man, or femininity by (lesbian or straight) women can have radical repercussions as well, if and when that performance, in whatever manner, denaturalizes social codes.[14] Mishima both performed gender and performed it theatrically. His life-corpus, I will argue, functions to denaturalize, through its very reliance on *reiteration as performance*, sex/gender roles. (And this is in spite of the fact that certain texts in isolation would appear to *naturalize* social norms of both hetero- and homosexuality through such reiteration, or simple performance divested of any notion of the theatrical or constructivity.) The first chapter on Mishima will show how Mishima-as-gestalt-text(s) enacts the epistemology of the closet through the various texts' (theatricalized/non-theatricalized) performances of heteronormativity and homosexual deviance. In other words, I will show how his texts enact the politics of the articulation/textualization of desire in a heterosexist economy and the converse, or the display of how desire is simultaneously inarticulable/unwritable. The second chapter returns the discussion to the book's central concern with relation to the other or the question of the other in homosexual "desire for the same," in the context of the problematic of fascist aesthetics. The third short chapter interprets some of Mishima's final texts (including his public suicide and *coup d'état*) as perverse capitulations to homosociality. Hence, I argue that Mishima's potentially radical articulation of desire ended up resembling fidelity to the simulacrum, albeit differently than Kawabata.

8 Textualizing flesh, or, (in)articulate desire

Shocking, "outlaw"[1] publications detailing various (homosexual and heterosexual) perverse eroticisms bound to sadism, masochism, and death, such as *Confessions*, *Patriotism* (*Yūkoku*, 1960) or the differently perverse *Forbidden Colors* (*Kinjiki*, 1951; 1953), which makes an aesthetic of betrayal, were, as I have already noted, radically different sorts of texts among Mishima's corpus. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (*Kinkakuji*, 1956; hereafter, *Golden Pavilion*), *The Sea of Fertility* (*Hōjō no umi*, 1960–1970), his epic tale of transmigration in the tetralogy, and many short stories de-emphasized Mishima's "perverse" erotics to focus instead on his nihilistic aesthetics. Many of these texts took up ontological-philosophical matters at some remove from sex or sexuality. An even more stark difference distinguishes his "outlaw" narratives from his so-called minor works, immensely popular, commercially viable narratives, and his celebrated *The Sound of Waves* (*Shiosai*, 1954), which depicted what one could call, in general, more "normal" heterosexual romances (although some perverse quirk is endemic to Mishima). John Nathan calls *The Sound of Waves* "neither perverted nor sardonic. Except for a passage or two which lingers more lovingly on the body of the handsome fisherman than the young girl, the book is unremittingly normal in the most conventional sense; in fact, it is Mishima's most assiduously healthy work."[2]

By announcing himself (implicitly as author) as a "latent homosexual" with an erotics bound to sadomasochism[3] with his first major publication, *Confessions*, Mishima's "heterosexual" texts (including not just *Sound of the Waves*, but his actual marriage and the birth of his child, for example) appear to be performance (here, performance as fraud). These "heterosexual" texts threaten the veracity of *Confessions*-as-autobiography (the often repeated critical assumption that the disclosures of *Confessions* are authorial confessions). *Patriotism* (a detailed fictional account of the double-suicide of a young officer and his wife following the failed right-wing uprising of February 28, 1936) develops a neo-fascistic, thoroughly *heterosexual* celebration of the erotics of suicide.[4] *Forbidden Colors* is *thematically* about the closet: it tells the tale of married homosexual Yuichi (who in some critics' readings "is" Mishima himself; or, conversely, the elderly novelist,

Shunsuke, a [possible] latent homosexual, could be imagined the stand-in for Mishima). Unlike the protagonist of *Confessions*, Yuichi desires amorous, not murderous, encounters with other men. Betrayal, however, replaces sadomasochism proper as the aesthetics of desire. The text chronicles Yuichi's homosexual escapades and describes the clandestine world of gay bars, parties, and cruising alongside Yuichi's machinations to keep his promiscuous homosexual activities a secret from his wife, mother, and in-laws. Yuichi's story is framed by the manipulations of the misogynist Shunsuke who uses Yuichi to enact revenge on women. In the process, Yuichi betrays all those who love him.

Faced with the radical *inconsistencies* of Mishima's corpus, critics have often chosen to regard certain texts as confessional or more revealing of the "true" Mishima. Nathan, for example, writes:

> in *Confessions of a Mask* he did dissect himself alive. What he hoped to find was the source of his fascination with death, in his own words, "the root source of [his] reckless, nihilistic estheticisism." What he discovered was his homosexuality.
>
> Reliving his life in *Confessions of a Mask* through his first-person hero, Mishima drove himself remorselessly to the recognition that he was a latent homosexual and worse, a man incapable of feeling passion or even alive except in sadomasochistic fantasies which reeked of blood and death.[5]

In contrast, Nathan reads *The Sound of Waves* as a sort of sham, even quoting Mishima as dubbing it "that joke on the public."[6] While undoubtedly the protagonist of *Confessions* reminded Nathan of the Mishima he personally knew and later researched, that textual representation is, as Nathan himself affirms, of course, only that: a textual representation. Still, Nathan reads some Mishima texts as depicting characters and ideology that are closer to Mishima's true feelings and attitudes, such as *Confessions*, or parts of *Kyoko's House* (*Kyōko no ie*, 1959). Nathan rightfully calls the latter text "terrifying," since it appears to foretell, through the character of the boxer, Mishima's actual life-acts to come, most chillingly, "in the boxer's solution to this existential crisis [which] is to join a group of right-wing extremists," bringing "the boxer to swear fidelity to an ideology he does not believe in" in order to ultimately discover the "rapture of death."[7] Conversely Sugimoto Kazuhiro goes to the other extreme, to insist upon the fictionality of *Confessions*, by noting that the text begins with the protagonist's claim that he remembers his birth. This proclamation, however, is immediately followed by the equivocation that no one believes him. Thus, narrative reliability, or the "truth" of what this narrator says, is from the very beginning threatened as falsehood or put into question. Sugimoto also quotes Mishima's own assertion that true confession in text, of the sort the *shishōsetsu* writers imagined they wrote, was an impossibility (because of

the mediation between "life" and "word").[8] Noguchi Takehiko argued that Mishima took on the *persona* of a sexual deviant as a metaphor for the contemporaneous era.[9] Fukuda Tsuneari praised the text as a brilliant work of total fiction.[10] The pairing of the performance of heterosexual normalcy in Mishima's more conventional texts with his perverse, be they hetero or homo, "outlaw" narratives resonate negatively against each other. This discordance suggests that none is any more, or any less, than performance, or the textualized reiteration of a set of social interpellations of sexed individuals. These alternative articulations of sexuality linked to subjectivity, or the sexed interpellation of the subject, denaturalize one another, and put all of the terms of "Mishima" into a mutual slide toward meaninglessness.

Given Mishima's prolific corpus, it is easy enough for the critic to choose, then, from a series of texts that depict heterosexual sexualities or the converse. One can further subdivide these "categories" along the lines of the depiction of sadomasochism or "normal" sexualities. By editing the corpus in this way, radically different authors come into existence. This is what Noguchi and Nathan mean when they call Mishima's texts a series of "masks." What does appear to remain constant throughout is the articulation of a problematic around the tension of *desire* and the impossibility of its fulfillment. This desire may be either articulated directly or negatively (as its inverse or metonymically) or sublimated into various tropings of yearning: ontological, aesthetical, philosophical, and so forth.

Joan Copjec has discussed the Lacanian notion of desire as follows:

> when Lacan insists that we must take desire literally, we can understand him to be instructing us about how to avoid the pitfall of historicist thinking. To say that desire must be taken literally is to say simultaneously that desire *must be articulated*, that we must refrain from imagining something that would not be registered on the single surface of speech, and that *desire is inarticulable*. For if it is desire rather than words that we are to take literally, this must mean that desire may register itself *negatively* in speech, that the relation between speech and desire, or social surface and desire, may be a negative one. As Lacan puts it, a dream of punishment may express a desire for what that punishment represses. This is a truth that cannot be tolerated by historicism, which refuses to believe in repression and proudly professes to be *illiterate in desire. . . . Disregarding desire, one constructs a reality that is realtight*, that is no longer self-external. One paves the way for the conception of a self-enclosed society built on the repression of a *named* desire.[11]

Hence, a reading that attempts to bridge the inconsistencies of Mishima's corpus might start with the Lacanian figure of desire and the fact of its contradictions rather than seeking to link some specific articulations of

desire to "reality" (and others to "fiction"). What I want to consider here are the plural articulations or manifestations of desire in language and the Symbolic. I ask, how do these manifestations, or textualizations, relate, in turn, to the real world, or the heteronormative configuration of desire in twentieth-century Japan? Between the two extremes, of resolute "normalcy" in how desire is textualized in *Sound of the Waves* and "absolute perversion," lie texts, actions, and performances everywhere along the spectrum. I would like to suggest that, while his "normal" heterosexual narratives perform straightness, or relative social norm, Mishima's "homosexual" texts outrageously, theatrically, reenact the "perverse" homosexual and his desire, as he is (in various, differing configurations) already scripted or interpellated by society at large. Accordingly, the following comment by Leo Bersani on Jean Genet is instructive to reading Mishima,

> What we have seen him [Genet] do is to renegotiate the values of given terms: he repeats society's accusation of him as a homosexual outlaw, meticulously seeking out every ramification, every implication of that accusation (much as his tongue industriously and lovingly sweeps up the waste around his lover's anus), making of a sterile, treacherous, even murderous relation to others the precondition of his sexual pleasure. But this still leaves Genet socially positioned. He is willfully offering transgressive spectacles to others, making himself in to a gaudy performer of their most lurid views of him. This is the best-known Genet, frozen in fussily obscene, theatricalizing postures, Genet wondering as he writes if he has found the perfect gesture. Here the aesthetic frequently arrests the erotic by monumentalizing moments of fantasy, thus putting an end to the escalating movement just discussed. Genet's preparation of the gestures and the poses by which we can only assume he hopes to be remembered counters the mobility and destructiveness of his erotic energy. Through these tableaux he defiantly – and nondialogically – addresses society's interpellations of him.[12]

Mishima and Genet's performances of transgressive spectacles of sexuality were also, however, different. The historical interpellations of the homosexual subject in modern France and modern Japan are, after all, not one and the same. In order to discuss how Mishima both performed sexuality, and theatricalized it, I sketch out below in some detail the social mores that informed modern Japanese concepts of (hetero/homo) sexuality, as well as their immediate historical precursors.

As Gregory Pflugfelder has shown, in stark contrast to the pre-eighteenth-century North American/Western European prohibitions against sodomy stand the Japanese Edo-period literary and artistic celebrations of anal sex and male–male erotic love, bound to both Buddhist and Confucian morals, practices, and ethics.[13] Male–male relations were, however, codified

by law to ensure that they did not threaten the existing consolidation of power. Practices were designated (further codified) by a series of specific terms such as *shudō*, literally, "the way of youths," but signifying "the way of loving youths," and *nanshoku*, or male erotic love of men. *Wakashu* designated a youth-as-erotic-object and recipient of anal penetration who was paired with the *nenja*, or the more senior partner who penetrated. None of these terms, as Pflugfelder has amply demonstrated, are commensurate with modern Japanese or North American/Western European notions of homosexuality. Edo male–male erotic practices did not designate a subjectivity but referenced sexual behavior. One was not a homosexual, but one engaged in sexual activities with another male, which did not preclude also engaging in sex with women. As Pflugfelder put it, " 'Loving youths' or 'loving women' was something one did rather than what one was."[14] Although boys, as one object of erotic interest, might be viewed as comparable to women, they were not regarded as like them, nor feminized.

> In *shudō*, the charms of youths had sometimes been compared to those of women, but their gender identities had remained for the most part distinct. The qualities that the *wakashu* shared with females were seen largely as a function of age, and coexisted with an incipient virility. It was expected that youth would eventually grown into men . . . [The celebrated Kabuki playwright Ihara] Saikaku had portrayed a sixty-three year old samurai male named Tamashima Mondo who continued to serve as a love object for his even older *nenja* Toyoda Han'emon . . . nowhere does he liken Tamashima to a woman. In order to retain his erotic desirability, Tamashima models himself not after females, but after the youth that he has long outgrown . . . Much less does Toyoda's sexual desire for a male render him feminine; instead, he is pictured as a "woman-hater" (*onnagirai*), hypermasculine rather than emasculated. Had Saikaku been writing in the early twentieth century, these characters would no doubt have emerged quite differently.[15]

Edo period acceptance of male–male erotic relations as one viable sexual choice or preference, however, had ended with the Meiji period. Rapid social, political, moral, medical, juridical, and other transformations, linguistic standardization, modernization, and Westernization led to the establishment of a heterosexist and homophobic economy.[16]

Michel Foucault, of course, described the development of this sexual economy in Western Europe. He historicized modern sexuality as emerging from a larger epistemological constellation (systems of truth and knowledge and institutions that emerged in the seventeenth century) of the articulation, dissemination, and dispersal of power into bodies, biopolitics, and sexual practices.[17] In spite of the radical differences attending male–male erotic practices in pre-twentieth-century Japan and France, with Meiji came a very

similar transformation of sex into sexuality, and the advent of the binarism homosexual/heterosexual, as both Pflugfelder and Vincent have so pervasively shown. As in modern France, in modern Japan this was a specific regime of knowledge and truth, which brought with it the medicalization of both madness and sexuality and made use of the economies of surveillance and confession (institutionally dispersed) to produce modern notions of "sex." A major factor in the articulation and dissemination of power into sexuality is achieved in text: literary, medical, juridical. European narrative texts like *My Secret Life* or those by de Sade are evidence of the projection onto literature of the injunction to "tell all." Similarly in Japan, Mori Ogai's *Vita Sexualis* takes its place among myriad *shishōsetsu* that evidence a similar dispersal of power into sex by means of a literature that replicates the technologies of surveillance and confession. In this regime, the "homosexual" and "pervert" as categories themselves emerge. It is no longer an act of sodomy that is outlawed, but an entire subjectivity (species, says Foucault) – the homosexual/the masochist/the onanist – that is produced. (Even where there are *no sexual acts*, to wit, the term "latent homosexual.") And, against the logic that power represses, Foucault proposes that prohibition produces what it prohibits. As Copjec explains so clearly (albeit in her challenge to historicism), "the prohibition 'you shalt not do X' must spell out what X is, must incite us to think about X, to scrutinize ourselves and our neighbors to determine whether or not we are guilty of X. The statement puts into play what it would abolish; even the disavowal becomes an avowal."[18]

With the promulgation of twentieth-century Japanese and Western European/North American sexology and psychological discourses on sex, male–male relations were severed from their Edo *bushidō* (way of the warrior) antecedents, transformed into "homosexuality," and the male lover of men becomes an "invert," made effeminate in the binding of sexual practice to modern sex/gender economies.[19] Prior to his resurrection of the notion of a divine emperor, Mishima publicly denigrated the "demasculinization" of Japanese men in the postwar, believing that men had become effeminate. Thus it is logical that Mishima resurrected the *bushidō* ethics of the Edo-period samurai-turned-Buddhist monk, Yamamoto Jōchō, which espoused total preparation for death. Mishima published his ruminations on the classical text *Hagakure* by Jōchō alongside a selection of excerpts from it. Included was the following:

> Absolute loyalty to the [*sic*] death must be worked at every day. One begins each day in quiet meditation, imagining one's final hour and various ways of dying – by bow and arrow, gun, spear, cut down by the sword, swallowed up by the sea, jumping into a fire, being struck by lightening, crushed in an earthquake, falling off a cliff, death from illness, sudden death – and begins the day by dying.[20]

Passages offer practical advice on how to comport oneself in work, leisure, attire, and attitude. There is also a passage with recommendations for those who preferred male–male love. If proper etiquette is followed, Jōchō insists that "male–male love goes very well with the Way of the Warrior."[21] Mishima's aesthetic of hypermasculinity was not challenged by *bushidō* homoeroticism. His resurrection of *Hagakure* can hence be seen, in part, as a resistance to the modern feminization of homosexual men. A passage in *Forbidden Colors* insists,

> The homosexual of promise, whoever he is, is one who recognizes that certain manliness within himself and loves it, and holds fast to it . . . As in that long-ago warlike time, loving a woman was an effeminate act; to Kawada [a homosexual] any emotion that ran counter to his own masculine virtue seemed effeminate. To samurai and homosexual the ugliest vice is femininity.
>
> (380)

Elsewhere in *Forbidden Colors* homosexuality is similarly severed from any feminization that might inhere in it. This is, in a sense, fulfilling what the term *onnagirai* designated. The term became a euphemism for the homosexual in the twentieth century, but in Edo did not necessarily *require* the practice of male–male sex.[22] As already noted, Yuichi's story is actually framed by the manipulations of (latent) homosexual (Shunsuke) who despises, and seeks revenge on women, buying Yuichi's cooperation in a series of acts of vengeance. Mishima further linked the feminization of men to literature and *language* in his "Bunshō tokuhon," insisting that male-authored narrative had been adulterated by feminized Heian discursive conventions.[23]

As Karatani Kōjin has argued, and Vincent has analyzed in some detail, one aspect of modern Japanese homosexuality was a resolute separation of homoerotics from the realm of politics through its relentless aestheticization.[24] At the same time as men loving men is feminized, homosexuality itself becomes purified as a thoroughly aesthetic domain. At the pinnacle of this aesthetic stands the boy-ideal, now called *bishōnen*, designating the beautiful, passive, young boy who is "the antithesis and antecedent of adult masculinity."[25] A frivolous comment made by Asada about Mishima's staged *coup d'état* and suicide testifies to the dominance of this aesthetic, while simultaneously evidencing the constitutively copresent depoliticization of homosexuality (that is the corollary to the aesthetical bracketing),

> If it was to have an aesthetic meaning then well, that would have been okay, wouldn't it, but it felt like an aesthetics completely undecided between pop sensibility and romantic sensibility. First, those uniforms were [Jersey] tacky (*dasai*) . . .[26] Nazi uniforms look sharp even now, but, those Shield Society uniforms – if you look at them now, you

> laugh . . . Moreover, the society members were not all beautiful youths (*bishōnen*) . . . I wished they had been a little more attractive (*bishōnen*).[27]

Here, Asada appears to complain that, as a homosexual, Mishima "should" have been concerned with aesthetics, and left politics alone. His comment is offhand and was a joke, not meant to be taken seriously. Still, it pinpoints one way in which Mishima's performance of his sexuality, by reconceptualizing aesthetics after his own nihilistic fashion, enacted a twisted (perverse, deviant) troping of what is socially expected of a Japanese twentieth-century homosexual. In the end, this theatrical performance led Mishima to embrace masculinity as a "modern warrior" and to advocate a sort of political terrorism.

Thus, against this "demasculinization" and de-politicization of modern Japanese homosexuality, Mishima had recourse to a homoerotics based on the ideals of the masculine warrior and readiness for death. Hyperbolically, dramatically, theatrically, some of Mishima's texts offered back to readers variant extant tropings of the homosexual: the misogynist, the warrior of the past, the bitchy *bishōnen* of the present (Yuichi of *Forbidden Colors*), the sadomasochistic (latent) homosexual of *Confessions*. These are examples of the many configurations of inscribed desire in Mishima's corpus, and they begin to suggest the complexity of how he performed/theatricalized sexuality and desire. By refusing a univocal expression of desire for one that is contradictory, his texts offer, to borrow Noguchi's phrasing again, a series of changing masks of Mishima. Frequently Mishima's writings posed the body in negative relation to words or language, and in life-acts as well as in acts of writing, Mishima sculpted his mind and body into a hypermasculine–nihilistic, alternately reiterating and rejecting expectations that inhered in his "queerness."[28] Leaving behind earlier exposés of "latent" and actualized homosexuality, most of his later texts shifted the narrative focus to an ontological-philosophic level, while he continued to sculpt his (physical) body. What is clear, then, at this point, is the difficulty Mishima poses for the critic or reader who wants to ferret out, to know or to confirm what was "real" about Mishima and, especially the "truth" about his desire.

How *did* Mishima regard "truth" or "reality"? Mishima clearly articulated his disdain for "the real" as it was given in nature, and described what has been called his nihilist aesthetics in terms of a perfection of forms attended by an aesthetics of the (surreptitious) abject.[29]

> The movement of Kashiwagi's hands [arranging flowers] could only be described as magnificent. One small decision followed another, and the effects of contrast and symmetry converged with infallible artistry. Nature's plants were brought vividly under the sway of an artificial order and made to conform to an established melody. The flowers and leaves, which had formerly existed *as they were*, had now been trans-

> formed into flowers and leaves *as they ought to be*. The cattails and the irises were no longer individual, anonymous plants belonging to their respective species, but had become terse, direct manifestations of what might be called the essence of the irises and the cattails.
>
> Yet there was something cruel about the movement of his hands. They behaved as though they had some unpleasant, gloomy privilege in relation to the plants. Perhaps it was because of this that each time that I heard the sound of the scissors and saw the stems of one of the flowers being cut I had the impression that I could detect the dripping of blood.[30]

The aestheticism of *Golden Pavilion* comes closest to that of Mishima's mentor, Kawabata, in its rejection of "the real" in favor of (human or historical or aesthetical) manipulation into an (eroticized) imaginary – into what it "should be." Yet Mishima goes further. His protagonist is a Zen acolyte who, having imagined the temple in all its perfection is deeply disappointed by the real temple. In the end, he engages in an act of terrorism, destroying the temple by arson. This willful destruction of the "real" is done, of course, so that the mediated imaginary, or myth, can *completely* replace the real. Once this task is accomplished, there is no real left to vie with the (aesthetical-personal) construct. A similar notion of the need for (a personalized) art to replace the real appears in *Forbidden Colors*. Here, however, it is also linked to an *unblocking* of the flow of (erotic, not just aesthetical) desire, "In order for Yuichi's desire to come into reality, either his desire or his concept of what was real must perish. In this world it is believed art and reality live quietly side by side, but art must dare break the laws of reality. Why? In order that it alone may exist."[31]

Reality is linked to the (physical) body. Art, for Mishima, a "man of letters" was, of course, intimately bound to word (the Symbolic). He agonized publicly over the tension between the body and language in, for example, "The Boy Who Wrote Poetry" ("Shi o kaku shōnen," 1954) and *Sun and Steel* (*Taiyō to tetsu*, 1968). Literary arts, wrote Mishima, are a "*perversion* of word" because word is severed from its universalizing function of pure communication and fetishized, or particularized.[32] Mishima's understanding of the conflict between flesh and word is sophisticated enough to know that, in the final analysis, neither the body nor the intellect can truly come into contact with the Real, thus his auspicious use of the word fetish below, written in *katakana* in the original.[33]

> In fact, by setting my fetish for reality and physical existence and my fetish for words on the same level, by making them an exact equation, I had already brought into sight the discovery I was to make later. From the moment I set the wordless body, full of physical beauty, in opposition to beautiful words that imitated physical beauty, thereby

> equating them as two things springing from one and the same conceptual source, I had in effect, without realizing it, already released myself from the spell of words.[34]

Lamenting how word/language must mediate reality, Mishima tried to discover the physical body as it ought to be, not as it was. Mishima believed that the body possessed a purpose or mission. The body should act as a vehicle for apprehending, or coming into actual contact with, not the real (for which he had no use) but the Real. This drive, toward *homeostasis* (as I have already described it throughout this study) is constitutively, according to psychoanalytic theory, erotic and simultaneously also constitutively comprised of desire within the economy of the death drive (that is inseparable from the libidinal quest for pleasure).[35] In addition, in his attempt to discover and follow a truth to his desire, Mishima embarked on a psychoanalytically *ethical* path.

> When I examine closely my early childhood, I realise that my memory of words reaches back far farther than my memory of the flesh. In the average person, I imagine, the body precedes language. In my case, words came first of all; then – belatedly, with every appearance of extreme reluctance, and already clothed in concepts – came the flesh. It was already, as goes without saying, sadly wasted by words . . . laying the ground for two contradictory tendencies within myself. One was the determination to press ahead loyally with the corrosive function of words, and to make that my life's work. The other was the desire to encounter reality in some field where words should play no part at all.
>
> (*Sun and Steel*, 8; 9)

Mishima insists that his body has no *a priori* existence external to discourse. His flesh has, so to speak, always already been inscribed by word. In Lacanian terms, the linguistic structure constructs the subject, who in turn represents him/herself through language in consciousness and gives a form to desire from the object-less function of the drive and its aim. It is this inscribing (the realm of the Symbolic, and its superegoic repression/channeling of the drive) that halts or blocks the flow of his desire. It is the "way things are," which one might call the real, but here the simple materiality of the real is complicated with the "real" of society (social norm/law), much like Lacan's notion of discourse and the desire of the Other, that interferes with the flow of Mishima's desire.

> As Yuichi saw it, economics was an extremely human subject. To the extent that it was connected directly and deeply with human desires, the activity of its organization was strengthened. At one time, in the developing years of free enterprise economics, it exhibited autonomous faculties, thanks to a close connection with the desires – the self-interest

> – of the rapidly rising bourgeoisie. Today, however, it was in a period of decline, owing to the fact that its organization had been separated from desire and mechanized, thus bringing about the attenuation of desire. A new system of economics had to find new desire.
>
> The greatest evil, certainly, lies only in reasonless desire, objectless desire. Why? Love with the object of propagating children, selfishness with the object of distributing profits, passion for the revolution of the working class with the object of attaining Communism are virtues in the various ruling societies.
>
> Yuichi did not love a woman, and the woman bore Yuichi a child. At that time he saw the ugliness, not of Yasuko's will, but of objectless desire in life. The proletariat also, without realizing it, are probably born from desire of this kind. Yuichi's economic studies had thus brought him to a new concept of desire. He conceived the ambition to make himself over into that desire.
>
> (*Forbidden Colors*, 309)

Leaving aside for now the question of the "evil" of objectless desire, Mishima here links desire to its investment in society and economics, if not to capital itself. Yuichi, in this moment, attempts to channel his "outlaw" (revolutionary) desire (which has been temporarily transformed into "objectless desire") into a (conscious) investment in capital and social norm. One might call this a compromise between a configuration of desire that resists social norm and one that supports it through its economic investment. Desire without an object is, in fact, "pure" drive, aiming itself at *jouissance*, refusing to anchor itself to a socially "appropriate" object. Mishima appears to understand (or make conscious) the conflict between the two unconscious investments of desire, as Deleuze and Guattari have described them,

> We define the reactionary unconscious investment as the investment that conforms to the interest of the dominant class, but operates on its own account, according to the terms of desire, through the segregative use of the conjunctive syntheses from which Oedipus is derived: I am of the superior race. The revolutionary unconscious investment is such that desire, still in its own mode, cuts across the interest of the dominated, exploited classes, and causes flows to move that are capable of breaking apart both the segregations and their Oedipal applications – flows capable of hallucinating history, of reanimating the races in delirium, of setting continents ablaze. No I am not of your kind, I am the outsider and the deterritorialized, "I am of a race inferior for all eternity . . . I am a beast, a Negro."[36]

These two "investments" of desire, made conscious and articulate, clash in Mishima. The (revolutionary) articulation of desire lies in the taking of

an anti-social position to proclaim, "I am a beast, a homosexual, a sadist" (like Genet), and the reactionary desire can be seen seeking its place in normative social mores. In addition, Mishima's "real" (things as they are) should be understood as shaped by a notion of social violence. There is a "cruelty of the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them . . . This culture is not the movement of ideology: on the contrary, it forcibly injects production into desire, and conversely it forcibly inserts desire into social production and reproduction."[37] In his "outlaw" texts, rejecting the social dictates of a heterosexist economy through perfected forms of body and word (re-sculpting the real), Mishima sought to give flow to his (revolutionary objectless) desire. Unbound by the real, Mishima's desire flowed toward the experiential apprehension of the Real, which of course is also death, precisely that which fascinated Kawabata, but that Kawabata steadfastly tried to avoid.

In the end, the violence that Mishima relied on in order to attain the constitutively impossible conscious experience of death, that is, the Real, was the violence turned back against the violence of culture, against the social refusal of radical difference (Derridean *différance*) that blocks up the free-flow of desire. But there is also an unbearable anxiety bound up with this desire. Both specifically and generally it is the "lack of a lack" that *is* anxiety, the dissolution of the (barred) subject's necessary distance (to maintain itself cohesively) from the Real. As Lacan put it, "anxiety is that which does not deceive. But anxiety may be lacking. In experience, it is necessary to canalize it and, if I may say so, to take it in small doses, so that one is not overcome by it. This is a difficulty similar to that of bringing the subject into contact with the real."[38] Mishima wrote:

> one also comes across a type of self-awareness that concerns itself exclusively with the form of things. For this type of self-awareness, the antinomy between seeing and existing is decisive, since it involves the question of how the core of the apple can be seen through the ordinary, red, opaque skin, and also how the eye that looks at that glossy red apple from the outside can penetrate into the apple and itself become the core. The apple in this case, moreover, must have a perfectly ordinary existence, its color a healthy red.
>
> To continue the metaphor, let us picture a single, healthy apple. This apple was not called into existence by words, nor is it possible that the core should be completely visible from the outside . . . The inside of the apple is naturally quite invisible. Thus at the heart of the apple, shut up within the flesh of the fruit, the core lurks in its wan darkness, *tremblingly anxious to find some way to reassure itself that it is a perfect apple*. The apple certainly exists, but to the core this existence as yet seems inadequate; if words cannot endorse it, then the only way to endorse it is with the eyes. Indeed, for the core the only sure mode of existence is to exist and to see at the same time. There is only one

> method of solving this contradiction. It is for a knife to be plunged deep into the apple, so that it is slit open and the core is exposed to the light – to the same light, that is, as the surface skin. Yet then the existence of the cut apple falls into fragments; the core of the apple sacrifices existence for the sake of seeing.
>
> (*Sun and Steel*, 64–5; emphasis added)

In this metaphor Mishima acknowledges that his desire for the Real stems from an *anxiety* over a doubt that despite the apple's (his) perfect, completely "healthy" (normal) *appearance*, the core – that holds the "truth" – is hidden even to himself. The only way to *know* is to expose that hidden core to vision/consciousness (which by destroying the external "body/skin" simultaneously destroys the subject/apple). Mishima appears to hope that, in that second of immediacy, the Real could be seen and experienced or apprehended. This could only be achieved with a destructive violence that would destroy the "normalcy" enacted in the (socially proscribed) real. Language is obviously insufficient for the task of reassurance/violence. As already noted, language (fetishized, severed from pure communicatory function), for Mishima, is the producer of difference. But so too, in opposition to the perfect, healthy, normal form of the apple-body, is the "imperfect, individual" body, the body on which flaws are *inscribed*. This inscribing, while part of the economy of the social control of desire, is a *specific* instance of such inscription. It is the "inverted" inscription of, not law, but the opposite of law – "outlaw" desire – on the subject-body. In *Forbidden Colors*, latent homosexual Shunsuke's face "was not so much molded by spirit as it was riddled with it. It was a face in which an excess of soul was laid bare, causing the onlooker to shrink from looking at it directly, as if it talked too openly of private things. In its ugliness his face was a corpse emaciated of spirit, no longer possessing the power to retain its privacy" (5). This anxiety over "the private" inscribed on the flesh, thus made *legible*, reappears in *Sun and Steel*.

> My body, while itself the product of an idea, would doubtless also serve as the best cloak with which to hide the idea. If the body could achieve perfect, non-individual harmony, then it would be possible to shut individuality up for ever in close confinement. I had always felt that such signs of physical individuality as a bulging belly (sign of spiritual sloth) or a flat chest with protruding ribs (sign of an unduly nervous constitution) were excessively ugly, and I could not contain my surprise when I discovered that there were people who loved such signs. *To me, these could only seem acts of shameless indecency, as though the owner were exposing his spiritual pudenda on the outside of his body*. They represented one type of narcissism that I could never forgive.
>
> (*Sun and Steel*, 17; emphasis added)

Indeed, Mishima states that his desire to build his muscles was a desire to erase his "difference," as marked by a frail physique. It is also important to acknowledge how Mishima bound the outer bodily form with an inner "spiritual pudenda" (*seishin no chibu*) whose display in the form of bodily imperfection he finds absolutely "unforgivable" (*Taiyō to tetsu*, 21). In a muscular body, Mishima sought to turn his "particular" and "different" (individual) body into a "universal" one (*Sun and Steel*, 22–33). Mishima desired to cloak his ideas that could, unless care was taken to prevent this, inscribe or mark his body like spiritual *genitalia* on the outside of his skin *to be read by anyone*. At the same time, he is obsessed by the desire to see what is now hidden. He is caught in a double bind of concealment and disclosure. In a sense, there is a "closeting" of the spiritual genitalia inside a perfectly masculine, healthy physique (a genitalia that nonetheless is *inscribed* symbolically on the body) and a simultaneous need to reveal (out) the hidden truth. This, obviously, is in *metaphoric form* precisely the dynamics of the closet as Eve Sedgwick has described them, informed by the binarisms of secrecy/disclosure; silence/articulations; public/private.[39] Vincent uses the word "paranoia" to describe the suspicious heterosexual anxiety that arises from the possibility of "being fooled by appearances."[40] Mishima's cloaking certainly stokes this economy's need to either out him or else disavow his perversion as fiction, in order that the anxious paranoia, which is the result of the unsettledness of knowing/not-knowing, can be put to rest.

Building on Foucault, Lee Edelman points out that historically in North America/Western Europe, "Homosexuals . . . were not only conceptualized in terms of a radically potent, if negatively charged, relation to signifying practices, but also subjected to a cultural imperative that viewed them as inherently textual – as bodies that might well bear a 'hallmark' that could, and must, be read."[41] Edelman has described the shift that Foucault mapped out, whereby social (juridical, medical, moral) interpretation of sexual behavior becomes linked to identity. To reiterate, certain sexual acts once perceived as contingent to subjectivity (metonymic to, not constitutive of it) are reinterpreted as metaphoric for, or essentially linked to, a specific category of "being" or subjectivity. The homosexual, so the logic went, could be "found out" because his intrinsic "homosexual nature" would be variously inscribed on his body or marked in readable ways. Thus, Edelman writes, there was

> a transformation from a reading of the subject's relation to sexuality as contingent or metonymic to a reading in which sexuality is reinterpreted as essential or metaphoric . . . Yet while the cultural enterprise of reading homosexuality must affirm that the homosexual is distinctively and *legibly* marked, it must also recognize that those markings have been, can be, or can pass as, unremarked and unremarkable.
>
> . . . we enter an era in which homosexuality becomes socially constituted in ways that not only make it available to signification, but

> also cede to it the power to signify the instability of the signifying function *per se*, the arbitrary and tenuous nature of the relationship between any signifier and signified.[42]

By transforming sex into sexuality, attended by a proliferation of discourses and confessions about sex, a *fixing* of subjectivity is achieved. In this context, the notion of the heterosexual arises out of its *not being* its circumscribed inverse, the homosexual. Society becomes heterosexist in this fixity, in which one *is* either one or the other, and in which sex acts are no longer contingent to, but constitutive of, identity. I repeat, this economy is, in general, also true of modern Japan.[43]

> The "writing". . . as which homosexuality historically is construed, names . . . the reduction of "différance" to a question of determinate difference; from the vantage point of dominant culture it names homosexuality as a secondary, sterile, and parasitic form of social representation that stands in the same relation to heterosexual identity that writing, the phonocentric metaphysics . . . occupies in relation to speech or voice . . . Writing . . . though it marks or describes those differences upon which the specification of identity depends, works simultaneously, as [Marie-Rose] Logan puts it, to "de-scribe," efface, or undo identity by framing difference as the misrecognitions of a "différance" whose negativity, whose purely relational articulation, calls into question the possibility of any positive presence or discrete identity.[44]

Against Mishima's adamant rejection of displaying one's "spiritual pudenda" on one's body and revulsion at the inscription of desire on the flesh (yet the compulsive desire to ferret out, and behold some hidden core himself), is the copresent *total lack of compunction against displaying it in text*, in any and all of the various performative venues that Mishima availed himself of. There, Mishima willfully and gleefully performed his (plural positionings toward) sexuality. Refusing to be marked legibly as body, Mishima, in a sense, manipulates the process of "sexuation" itself by manipulating the performance of sex/sexuality in text. This, in fraternity with his "active nihilism," *replaces a "something there" with a "nothing there."* Or, it is the destabilization of the signifier that reveals drive to be inarticulable, yet always articulated, by reversing the (historical) substitution of difference for *différance*. This is why searching for "the real Mishima" one finds instead contradiction upon contradiction or mask upon mask. The effect of Mishima's theatricalizations of sexuality is the signifying of a radical alterity to the fixity of heterosexist society, an evocation of *différance* against binaristic difference. Thus, the *structural* logic of his alternations between "outlaw" texts such as *Confessions* with traditional heterosexual romances such as *The Sound of Waves*, or his shift from anti-traditional Japan to advocate for the resurrection of the mythic, divine emperor is

one of over-determination, or overfilling of the signifier "Mishima." Each alternation, in effect, challenges, or makes slide, the axioms of the others. What one is left with is a hopelessly overdetermined contradictory presence, negated by its "inverse" (a form of which, "invert," Mishima actually uses, following German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, to *name* "the homosexual" in *Confessions* [in effect, naming desire]).

In the end, Mishima's performances leave the reader with no positive, distinctly cohesive subjectivity *qua* sexual orientation. Accordingly, Iwai Kazumasu resorted to pathologizing Mishima, claiming that an analysis of the "theatricality" of Mishima's characters and their overwhelming alienation from their own actions points to Mishima's "identity diffusion."[45] Nathan writes that *Kyoko's House* "proclaims from every page his feeling that the identity he appeared to inhabit so substantially and unequivocally, as a famous novelist, playwright, critic, and an eccentric flamboyant with a zest for life, was to Mishima himself nothing more than a collection of masks; that despite triumphant moments . . . he was no more in touch with the vital sense of truly *existing* than he had ever been since the war's end."[46] Mishima *performs*, in life and in text, the outlaw homosexual, the straight aestheticist, the right-wing fascist, the loving husband and father. These roles are enactments of existing terms that culturally inhere in his so-called sexual identity and its so-called inverse. The rejection of language-inscribed-on-body, the perfection of a "universal" (unmarked) body, and the confession in performative texts of (various forms of) sexuality, are precisely enactments of the textualization of (homo)sexuality that Edelman has described as the identificatory-production of the very category homosexuality (and, of course, its constitutive other, heterosexuality).

In building my argument that Mishima's "nihilism" (the nothing there) is a consequence of an attempt to get out of the already written, always already inscribed, textualized limitations of "being homosexual," I have deferred the problematic of (the very concept of) sadism and masochism, or as it is most commonly called, sadomasochism. As have other theorists, Freud regarded sadism and masochism as sharing a common origin. On erotogenic masochism,[47] Freud wrote that there are

> two varieties of instincts which we believe to be active in animate beings . . . In the multicellular living organism the libido meets the death or destruction instinct which holds sway there, and which tries to disintegrate this cellular being and bring each elemental primary organism into a condition of inorganic stability . . . To the libido falls the task of making this destructive instinct harmless, and it manages to dispose of it by directing it to a great extent and early in life – with the help of a special organic system, the musculature – towards the objects of the outer world. It is then called the instinct of destruction, of mastery, the will to power. A section of this instinct is placed directly in the service of the sexual function, where it has an important part to play:

> this is true sadism. Another part is not included in this displacement outwards; it remains within the organism and is 'bound' there libidinally with the help of the accompanying sexual excitation mentioned above: this we must recognize as the original erotogenic masochism . . . It might be said that the death-instinct active in the organism – the primal sadism – is identical with masochism. After the chief part of it has been directed outwards towards objects, there remains as a residuum within the organism the true erotogenic masochism, which on the one hand becomes a component of the libido and on the other still has the subject itself for an object.[48]

I have already discussed Mishima's "disdain for the real" and quest for the Real as intrinsically related to the (erotic) death drive. For Theodor Reik, in sadism the death instinct is expressed as the will to power turned outside the subject against the world of objects. However,

> Another part of the death instinct remains within the organism. Through its efficacy we all are led into annihilation. Also this introverted death directed against the ego can experience the power of Eros, in masochism. Masochistic urges, like sadism, are no longer expressions of pure death instinct, but of combined drive. In masochism the combination of the death instinct and Eros is turned against the ego. What pleasure of destruction remained in the ego has amalgamated with sexual instincts. The ego certainly continues to be the object of the death instinct and the object of the libido as well. It has become the object of a cruel lover.[49]

Many commentators have simply applied the Freudian notion of sadomasochism to describe Mishima. Deleuze, however, challenged psychoanalytic interpretations of sadism and masochism as related economies of desire.[50] Building on some of Freud's work on sadomasochism, particularly his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (which he here calls an "admirable text"[51]), Deleuze insists that the "true" sadist cannot stand cooperation of any sort from his/her object of torture. Masochistic pairs (one might use now-popular terms such as a "top" and a "bottom," although these are not his terms), to the contrary, cooperate as they stage their scenes of domination and humiliation. In his articulation of masochistic economies (in terms of a particular aesthetics and language), Deleuze effectively jettisons the "true" sadist outside the (newly articulated) mutually consensual and ultimately contractual relationship between a (newly designated) masochistic "top" (no longer a sadist proper, but the pupil of the "bottom") and "bottom" (now understood to be, paradoxically, the one in control, the educator and persuader).

> A genuine sadist could never tolerate a masochistic victim . . . Neither would the masochist tolerate a truly sadistic torturer. He does of

> course require a special "nature" in the woman torturer, but he needs to mold this nature, to educate and persuade it in accordance with his secret project, which could never be fulfilled with a sadistic woman.[52]

Following to some degree Reik's classic description of the nature of masochism, Deleuze calls masochism "a different language."[53] Severed from the Freudian notion of "the masochist-as-passive," the "true" masochist is decidedly active: he (generally male) orchestrates the spectacle of his own torture. Conversely, sadism depends on pure control and domination. Sadism uses fantasy to maximize aggression that is subsequently projected or enacted onto the real world. Masochistic use of fantasy, to the contrary, "consists in neutralizing the real and containing the ideal within the fantasy."[54] More importantly perhaps for Deleuze, the sadist is simply unimaginative, inartistic, or one might say, boring.

Some queer theorists have also taken up the challenge of theorizing sadomasochism, particularly because the Freudian interpretation of male masochism discovers a repressed homosexual desire at the core of masochism.[55] For Bersani (male) masochism is socially subversive, most pointedly, by placing the man in the (theatrically enacted) position of the dominated (traditionally a female positioning, as in Freud, where the woman is inherently, constitutively masochistic).[56]

Read against Foucault's genealogy of power and sexuality, as I have already summarized it, Deleuze's careful elaboration of the masochistic aesthetic is, of course, also a discursive elaboration of a technology or a regime of knowledge about masochism, collusive with the infiltration of power into sex. (Even more so Reik's study.) It neatly parallels the process that Foucault has theorized as the production of modern sexuality, out of which, for example, the concept of the homosexual or the pervert, is produced. The masochistic aesthetics (or language) of surveillance, gazing, and display replicate the economies or technologies of power in sexuality that Foucault has described. This, of course, is the Foucauldian double bind; resistance must always take its position within power. Even resistance is thus re-appropriated into a discourse of power.

But there is more that is being recuperated by these post-Freudian, post-Foucaultian theorists of masochism. What Foucault and other historicists foreclose, as Copjec has so convincingly argued, is (the Lacanian notion of) desire, that, to reiterate, must be articulated but is also inarticulable, and may indeed register in language negatively or metonymically. "*Disregarding desire, one constructs a reality that is realtight*, that is no longer self-external. One paves the way for the conception of a self-enclosed society built on the repression of a *named* desire."[57]

Deleuze wrote *Coldness and Cruelty* in 1967. But in 1972 he and Guattari published *Anti-Oedipus*. There his project is, if I am to grossly oversimplify, to overturn the entire structure of a psychoanalytic epistemology based

on the Freudian family romance and Oedipal structuration because it delimits, infantilizes, and simplifies desire into a specific (single, univocal) matrix. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari (although they are in *Anti-Oedipus* fiercely anti-Freudian) seek a concept of desire much closer to that articulated by Lacan, as explained in the previous quote from Copjec. For Deleuze and Guattari, what is most important about this silencing of plurality into a univocal discourse is how it is, actually, a sort of (banal) fascism. This fascism is inherent in the economy of desire and its repression in contemporary capitalist societies. It is the problematic, in part, of our (shared) desire for domination and/or to dominate. *Anti-Oedipus* sought to analyze "the specific nature of the libidinal investments in the economic and political spheres . . . [to] show how, in the subject who desires, desire can be made to desire its own repression – whence the role of the death instinct in the circuit connecting desire to the social sphere. All this happens, not in ideology, but well beneath it."[58]

Mishima's performances and textualizations of gender/sexuality, which I have characterized as ultimately revealing a "nothing there," can be described as the plural articulations of inarticulable desire. Yuichi's desire, to reiterate, can only come into reality through destroying the real = social law and norm. Especially in his drive toward death, in the attempt to get beyond the real (libidinal investment in social spheres), Mishima continually gestured toward the Real, or the radical surplus to signification or the real or sociality. This he did in radical opposition to the leveling of (post)modernity, or the relativization of all terms that denies the possibility of the "real" sadist (that *Coldness and Cruelty* foreclosed from Deleuze's idealized masochistic economy). To historicize these theorists of sadomasochism, while they reclaim desire to historicism itself, the manner in which desire is divested of radical sadism also embodies the aspect of postmodernity that Jean Beaudrillard has described as "the psychodrama of otherness." The radical Other is disavowed, while otherness is reconfigured as mere relational, and thus relativized, difference.

> The radical Other is intolerable: he cannot be exterminated, but he cannot be accepted either, so the negotiable other, the other of difference, has to be promoted.
>
> We are engaged in an orgy of discovery, exploration and "invention" of the Other. An orgy of differences . . . Crude otherness, hard otherness, the othernesses of race, of madness, of poverty – are done with . . .
>
> Consequently, the other is all of a sudden no longer to be exterminated, hated, rejected or seduced, but instead to be understood, liberated, coddled, recognized . . . For the orgy is also an orgy of political and psychological *comprehension* of the other – even to the point of resurrecting the other in places where the other is no longer to be found. Where the Other was, there has the Same come to be . . .
>
> We are living the psychodrama of otherness.[59]

For Baudrillard, in postmodernity, evil is divested of its most radical aspects – because neither god nor the devil exist, ethics, morals, notions of crime, and so on, are all relativized. On the one hand, tolerance of cultural difference dictates that one accept atrocities under the rubric of "difference," while on the other, absolute evil – or even any concept of the Other – is disavowed. The move to posit the sadist outside the masochist pair enacts this liberation of the other that depends on such a disavowal of the Other. Turning its own discourse on its head, the masochistic aesthetic insists that the one in power is perversely the recipient of torture, or the "bottom." The "top," or torturer, is divested of responsibility, and retroped as the "pawn" of the bottom. The big O Otherness of the sadist has been transformed into the small o otherness of relativism, or just another version of homology. In part, it is against this leveling of difference that Mishima sought to return the Other to the postmodern arena of likeness. Tomioka Kōichirō argued, for example, that Mishima's resurrection of the emperor was precisely the attempt to "redeify" a godless postmodernity with the conscious and intentional employment of myth.[60]

But there is another effect of this jettisoning of the sadist outside of the masochistic economy; or the postmodern leveling and refusal of radical difference. Because, as Baudrillard has argued, there is no way left to deal with, even to "think," Otherness that refuses to be relativized. The real serial killer, Hitler, fascism, death, terrorism or other unthinkable evils revive, or uncannily return. This, of course, is metaphorically the province of the Real.

Mishima has been called both sadist and masochist. And indeed, his corpus confounds attempts like Deleuze's to sever one economy from the other. As I hope I have shown, Mishima appears to have begun his career as a writer by precisely, to requote Deleuze, "neutralizing the real and containing the ideal within the fantasy." Deleuze asked, "What is the meaning of the meeting of violence and sexuality in such excessive and abundant language as that of Sade and Masoch? How are we to account for the violent language linked to eroticism?"[61] This, he argued, was the product of a masochistic aesthetic linked to a specific language of violence from the *perspective of the victim*. Mishima's *Confessions* is filled with such violent, erotic language, but from the perspectives of both victim and torturer. Repeatedly he tells the reader how much he longs for his own death. But most of his fantasies are decidedly *sadistic*.

> I delighted in all forms of capital punishment and all implements of execution. But I would allow no torture devices nor gallows, as they would not have provided a spectacle of outpouring blood. So far as possible I chose primitive and savage weapons – arrows, daggers, spears. And in order to prolong the agony, it was the belly that must be aimed at. The sacrificial victim must send up long-drawn-out, mournful, pathetic cries, making the hearer feel the unutterable loneliness of

> existence. Thereupon my joy of life, blazing up from some secret place deep within me, would finally give its own shout of exultation, answering the victim cry for cry.[62]

And, even though Mishima's final performance appears masochistic (he engineers his own death), there is another important factor. There is no "top" whom he has manipulated to torture him to his utmost pleasure-in-death. He reserved this role for himself by disemboweling himself (in spite of the presence and assistance, in the end, of a second). Mishima, then, was his own executioner, simultaneously the "true" sadist and the "true" masochist. (Once again, defiantly defying any attempts to produce a unified, coherent "subjectivity" *qua* sexual predilection/perversion.) Against the leveling and relativization of postmodernity, Mishima opted for a revival of radical Otherness in his quest to apprehend the Real. Nonetheless Mishima also sought this radical Otherness within his own economy of desire. The contract was with himself and the torture went far beyond staging to the Real itself – the drive toward death was ultimately not sublimated. In place of the death drive, Mishima embraced biological death. And still it was a theatrical performance.

9 Narcissism and sadism
Mishima as homofascist[1]

The question remains, however, of Mishima-the-fascist. Over and over, critical commentary on Mishima has pointed out that his embrace of the right wing and calls to resurrect the emperor were not "truly" political actions. First, as many critics have contended, in actuality Mishima was far less interested in politics than in the creation of a context for an enactment or performance of his philosophy of active nihilism. According to Toda Yoshio, "the real essence of his outlook on nationalism was on the level of a [thoroughly] subjective grasp [of history and nation]."[2] Arguing that the only thing tying Mishima to the right rather than the left wing in Japan was his belief in the emperor, Matsumoto Ken'ichi claimed, "Mishima wanted to be right wing because [his ideology was] based on the emperor, but he was never a right wing ideologue."[3] Second, regarding Mishima's death, Irie Takanori insisted that on a social and historical level, Mishima's death was not the "explication" of national myth but the *enactment* of it.[4] Third, Mishima was in no way a naïve believer in "actual" imperial divinity. Rather, he understood that this ideal emperor was an invention – a mythicized imaginary of the past. He made this clear in his controversial "Bunka bōei ron," and soon thereafter in an open letter to literary critic Hashikawa Bunzō (1922–83) who had responded critically to the publication. Mishima admitted that his "idea" of the emperor was both anti-historical (*hirekishiteki*) and transhistorical (*chōrekishiteki*), because the anarchism out of which the essence of the emperor as Mishima envisioned it had indeed never once actually existed in the past.[5]

Obviously, from many angles, Mishima's nationalism was in keeping with the ontologization of cultural loss and the "palingenetic politics of time" integral to reactionary modernism and at the very foundations of fascist ideology, as I have detailed them in the chapters on Kawabata. But the mythic essence of the nation is embodied, for Mishima, not in the people (the *Volk* or *minzoku*) but in the institution of the emperor.

> I think that the emperor as cultural concept, which consists of (*naru mono*) the overall will of Japanese culture, is transcendentally signified. Moreover, I am trying to find the manifestation (*chōkō*) [of this

> transcendentally signified notion of the emperor] within a genealogy of aesthetical terrorism. In other words, I seek to discern in the emperor the point of contact between the cultural non-order that [total] freedom of speech attains, and the anarchism that aesthetical terrorism connotes.[6]

Most commentators have described Mishima's fascism as, rather than "real" (political or national) fascism, a personal, emotive fascism. The neo-fascist movement's embrace of action and militarism bound with myth replacing "the real" offered Mishima a platform on which to enact his performances of "warrior ready for death," but it really didn't matter to him what the specifics of the political platform were. Years before his actual suicide, *Patriotism* had linked "political" death to eros; *Kyoko's House* foretold the boxer's (Mishima's stand-in?) disingenuous fraternity with ideology he did not believe in. During the anti-Ampo riots, Mishima was excited and thrilled by activism by *leftists*.[7] Hence, Matsumoto mused that it really didn't matter to Mishima if he joined the left or the right, so long as his participation could take the necessary form of activist nihilism (which in the end required, for Mishima, the symbolic emperor system).[8] Mishima marshaled fascism to serve the needs of his *personal*, aesthetical, and simultaneously homoerotic nihilism. Once again, Bersani's discussion of Genet has resonance for a reading of Mishima.

> Both his [Genet's] abhorrent glorification of Nazism and his in some ways equally abhorrent failure to take that glorification seriously express his fundamental project of *declining to participate in any sociality at all . . . to enter into serious "communication" with Nazism would be to misunderstand its mythic importance as a horrific figure for a will to be no longer defined, in good or evil, as human. The Nazism of Funeral Rites is not a cause; it is the apocalyptic appearance in history of an impulse to erase history*.[9]

I have already suggested that Mishima's refusal to "participate in sociality" is in part a reactive violence to the violence of the heteronormative denial of the non-identity, or namelessness, of desire. Indeed, in his refusal to enter into "real" political communication with fascism in his embrace of neo-fascism he looks much like Genet.[10] But there is another aspect that already – prior to Mishima's embrace of neo-fascism – tropes him as amenable to fascism or replicating structural aspects of fascism. That is because, in the putatively narcissistic desire for the same of homosexuality, and thus the supposed elision of the other, some have discerned the very essence of fascism.

It was the Frankfurt School with its incorporation of psychoanalytic theory that theorized the putative structural link between fascism and homosexuality, holds Hewitt. In the writings of Theodor Adorno and Max

Horkheimer "homosexuality is pathologized as a potentially fascistic fascination with the erotics of power, and . . . fascism, in turn, is presented as a psychosexual manifestation of homosexual narcissism."[11] For these theorists, homosexual desire is intrinsically narcissistic (in opposition to heterosexual desire, which would be object-oriented) and arises out of a failed resolution of the Oedipal complex and, hence, is like fascism.[12] I will return to the issue of narcissism in Mishima shortly, but want to note first that, for the Frankfurt school, fascism and homosexuality are also similar in their essence as "false" performance.

> The desiring structure of fascism is specific not in its projection of the condition of subjectivity . . . but in its performative reversal of the condition of lack . . . What is specific to fascism is not, then, its mythification of political subjectivity or its inability to constitute a political subject, but quite the reverse – its *enactment* of subjectivity, its withdrawal of political subjectivity from the semioisis of a representation into the immanence of a performance. The semantic scandal of fascism lies in its performative contradiction – the creation of a subjectivity from a collective avowal of its lack.[13]

Homosexuality is also understood to be performative, although differently so than fascism.

> For Adorno homosexuality is intrinsically performative, acting itself out in the performance of something else: heterosexuality. Identified with false mimesis – or with the troubling suspicion that *all* mimesis is false – homosexual desire acquires its specificity in its ability – and indeed its eagerness – to masquerade as something else. In effect, Adorno is onotologizing the condition of repression: the desire that is repressed is at the same time a (mimetic) desire *for* repression, a desire for representation as repression.[14]

Keith Vincent's pathbreaking dissertation chapter on Mishima and Ōe Kenzaburō has shown precisely how the sign or signifier "Mishima" (the public persona) as "homofascist" is inseparable from an anxiety about stability in representation and a paranoia about the performance of "false" representation. Vincent's discussion focuses on the "signifier" Mishima or how commentary on Mishima's *life* discloses this anxiety over stable signification – reminiscent of Irie's claim that somehow Mishima *embodies* his ideology.[15] This, Vincent argues, is evident in criticism on Mishima as, for example, in an essay by Miyoshi that contrasts Mishima to Ōe and tropes Mishima as,

> embody[ing] in his very queer person the surrendering of subjectivity and the "susceptibility" to representation for its own sake that would

> characterize the fascist order . . . the effeminized, "self-indulgent" Mishima is fooled by fascism's own representational order – an order which is in fact characterized by the collapse of subject and object which would make "true" representation possible in the first place. If Ōe's *work* can be read as a critique of the sexualization and aestheticization of politics called fascism, Mishima's *life* is here read as an enactment of and a signifier for the same. Whereas Ōe's work has served to cement the pathologizing model of homosexuality as an ailment of subjectivity which threatened the return of fascism, Mishima's "revue-like theatricality" *enacts* that threat and thereby literalizes the usurpation of the signified by the signifier in what might be seen as a moment of queer performance.[16]

In fact, Mishima explicitly and flamboyantly theatricalized the troping of homosexual desire as "desire for the same" or "narcissistic," by conflating homosexual protagonists' desire for other men with a desire directed at their own bodies. Repeatedly Shimada, who produced a series of texts in the 1980s parodying Mishima, focused on the elision of all "others" (*tasha*) in Mishima's reformulations of the real after his private, narcissistic, erotic imaginary. Many critical essays have made Mishima's narcissism their focus.[17] The phrase "this Narcissus" becomes an alternative name for Yuichi in *Forbidden Colors*. Middle-aged, unattractive men successfully become Yuichi's lovers if they are skilled enough at "transforming themselves into mirrors that reflect Yuichi" back to himself (160). Nobutaka seduces Yuichi with a long monologue about Yuichi's beauty.

> Yuichi was overcome by a deep lassitude, a sudden sensation of sleepiness and intoxication. The portrait painted by Nobutaka's words [descriptions of Yuichi] stole out of the mirror and gradually bore down upon Yuichi . . . Desire mingled with desire; desire redoubled desire . . . Without any help from desire, Yuichi's spirit was coupled with the spirit of another Yuichi which was already mingling with it. Yuichi's forehead touched Yuichi's forehead; beautiful eyebrows touched beautiful eyebrows. The dreamy youth's half-open lips were stopped by the beautiful lips of the self that he had dreamed up.
>
> (162)

By channeling his desire for Yuichi into the creation of a mythic Yuichi for Yuichi's consumption, Nobutaka succeeds in seduction. Although Yuichi has no desire for Nobutaka, Nobutaka stokes Yuichi's putative desire for himself. So does Kawada, another older, savvy, experienced lover. Novelist Shunsuke ponders,

> He did not know how terribly bored the youth always was; and what kept this Narcissus from being bored even more was the fact that this

> world was filled with nothing but mirrors; in the prison of the mirror this beautiful captive could be held for the rest of his life. The aging Kawada at least knew how to transform himself into the mirror.
>
> (*Forbidden Colors*, 279–80)

What Kawada and Nobutaka do, more accurately, is transform Yuichi for his own contemplation into his ideal ego, the imaginary self that is more than it is, as formulated in the mirror stage. "To this ideal ego is now directed the self love which the real ego enjoyed in childhood."[18] This is indeed narcissism, or as Copjec explains it:

> Since something always appears to be missing from any representation, narcissism *cannot* consist in finding satisfaction in one's own visual image. It must, rather, consist in the belief that one's own being exceed the imperfections of its image. Narcissism, then, seeks the self beyond the self-image, with which the subject constantly finds fault and in which it constantly fails to recognize itself. What one loves in one's image is something *more* than the image ("in you more than you"). Thus is narcissism the course of the malevolence with which the subject regards its image, the aggressivity it unleashes on all its own representations.[19]

Narcissism must be understood in relation to this malevolence, not only to its putative self-eroticism. In this regard, the graphic and erotic language of violence in Mishima's texts can be regarded as an expression of, precisely, narcissism. *Confessions* hyperbolically commingles desire directed outward toward another with a maturbatory self-as-erotic object – seeking the self "beyond" the (imperfect) self-image, by seeking the other, also the ideal ego, in himself.

> Ever since becoming obsessed with the picture of St. Sebastian, I had acquired the unconscious habit of crossing my hands over my head whenever I happened to be undressed . . . As I did so my eyes went to my armpits. And a mysterious sexual desire boiled up within me . . . There is no doubt that [my classmate] Omi himself was involved in my sexual desire, but neither could it be denied that this desire was directed mainly toward my own armpits . . . I indulged in my "bad habit" out in the open, there beneath the blue sky. As its object I chose my own armpits.
>
> (88–9)

In this description of masturbation, it is of course not the subject himself *per se* that is the "object" of sexual desire, but a fragmented, objectified body part of the protagonist inseparable from the *objet petit a* of the portrait of Saint Sebastian (source–object of the protagonist's desire), commingled with the image of his classmate. The passage aptly demonstrates

Freud's contention that "ego-libido is . . . only conveniently accessible . . . when it has been put to use cathecting sexual objects, that is, when it has become object-libido."[20] Libido directed at one's own self, or ego-libido and object-libido "at first in the narcissistic state . . . exist side by side and . . . our analysis is not a fine enough instrument to distinguish them; only where there is object-cathexis is it possible to discriminate a sexual energy – the libido – from an energy pertaining to the ego-instincts."[21]

As a matter of fact, in his early work on narcissism Freud postulated "a primary narcissism in everyone."[22] That is, our libido's first object is our own ego.

> Freud states that all libido is narcissistic because all libido belongs to the ego. His later work allows us to reassign (narcissistic) libido to the drive, to the "headless" or egoless subject of the drive. It would be impossible, however, to detect the presence of libido – or narcissism, for that matter – *were it not for the libidinal cathexis of objects*. Narcissistic libido is never directly evident; we infer it only on the basis of object-libido or object cathexis.[23]

This shift, from understanding narcissism as originating in the ego to, properly speaking, belonging to the drive, means that narcissism entails "neither the fusion or melding of the subject with a hypnotic, mermerizing [*sic*] object nor the subject's discovery of its own reflection everywhere outside himself in the objects he sees, but an encounter between the impersonal drive and the object as is."[24]

> [T]o love is to want to be loved; love is always narcissistic . . . [which does not] mean either "I love you so that you may be induced to love me back" or "I love you because you remind me of myself." One cannot . . . love onself [*sic*] directly because one cannot take oneself as an object. The "I" of the subject is a hole in being. How then can one love onseself [*sic*]; whence comes the experience of "oneself" on which narcissism depends? From the shattering jouissance one experiences in loving another. The "I" is a "passionate inference," as [Leo] Bersani correctly says, an experience of the body, that comes from the libidinal cathexis of objects. What looks like an impatiently passive stance at first – wanting to be loved – is in fact the return curve of the drive to love.[25]

This point brings Copjec back to the issue of the relation between narcissism and sublimation, since narcissism, as already quoted, cannot take the subject him/herself directly as an object, but only its image, or better yet, its idealized image. In fact, the subject herself is inferred through the process of a shattering of ego boundaries – in the inference of an "I" that comes about through the postulation of herself as a subject from the shattering experience of *jouissance*.[26] Hence, Copjec's assertion that "narcis-

sism is approached only via sublimation, but does so while making obvious the role of object cathexes in this relation."[27] (Sublimation, as I have already argued, following Copjec, in "Virgins and other little objects," must be understood *not* as an act that separates thought from sex but from the Other). Finally, this "primary" narcissism is the very process by which the subject comes into being as a transgression of the law.[28]

> The effect of representation . . . is not a subject who will harmonize with, or adapt to, its environment (the subject's narcissistic relation to the representation that constructs him does not place him in happy accord with the reality that the apparatus constructs for him). The effect of representation is, instead, the suspicion that some reality is being camouflaged, that we are being deceived as to the exact nature of some thing-in-itself that lies behind representations. In response to such a representation, against such a background of deception, the subject's own being breaks down between its unconscious being and its conscious semblance. At war both with its world and with itself, the subject becomes guilty of the very deceit it suspects.[29]

The narcissistic economy that produces the "culpable" subject is part of the *stabilization* of the subject, as desiring effect of the law. The subject is always animated by desire that is the (imagined) desire of the other.

Turning back to the problematic of homosexuality and narcissism, the notion that homosexual desire dispenses with a relationship with the other and replaces it with "narcissism," should firstly now be clearly understood as a vulgar and vastly simplified account of narcissism (and this is not negated by the fact that Freud characterized homosexuality as "narcissistic").[30] Secondly, the perceptions of *difference* in the heteronormative economy rely on the binarism of male/female. It is this that, by extension, tropes homosexual desire as fascistic or at least unethical. Edelman has critiqued this epistemological construct,

> The imperative to differentiate categorically between hetero- and homosexualities serves the dominant "heterosexual" principle of an essential (and oppositional) identity while homosexuality would introduce difference or heterogeneity into what passes for the same. Where heterosexuality, in other words, seeks to assure the sameness or purity internal to the categorical "opposites" of anatomical "sex" by insisting that relations of desire must testify to a difference only imaginable outside, and thus "between," those two "natural," "self-evident" categories, homosexuality would multiply the differences that desire can apprehend in ways that menace the internal coherence of the sexed identities that the order of heterosexuality demands. Homosexuality is constituted as a category, then, to name a condition that must be represented as determinate, as legibly identifiable, precisely insofar as it threatens to

> undo the determinacy of identity itself; it must be metaphorized as an essential condition, a sexual orientation, in order to contain the disturbance it effects as a force of dis-orientation. Recalling in this context metaphor's appeal to the idea of essence or totalizable identity, we can say that homographesis, in its second or deconstructive sense, exposes the metonymic slippage, the difference internal to the "same" signifier, that metaphor would undertake to stabilize or disavow.[31]

If the other is (only) configured by being sexually different, that is, by possessing a different set of genitals in the binary of male/female, then one might first imagine that homosexuality precludes a type of ethics, the ethics that emerges from the radical unknowability of the other. But, of course, on closer examination this is absurd. Not only does it obscure the radical unknowability of the self; it makes "sameness" of difference that belongs in another register, so to speak, a difference that does not take genital configuration as the only difference that matters. And also, of course, this is the axiom that is most unsettled by the *différance* inherent in homosexual desire. While sexual difference may indeed be "real" it leads precisely to the unknowability of self and is not dependent on the articulation of (constitutively content-less) desire.

> To say that the subject is sexed is to say that it is no longer possible to have any knowledge of *him* or *her*. *Sex serves no other function than to limit reason, to remove the subject from the realm of possible experience or pure understanding*. This is the meaning, when all is said and done, of Lacan's notorious assertion that "there is no sexual relation": sex, in opposing itself to sense, is also, by definition, opposed to relation, to communication . . . *male and female, like being, are not predicates, which means that rather than increasing our knowledge of the subject, they qualify the mode of the failure of our knowledge*.[32]

After all, the unknowability of the other/Other – or the radical difference that the other/Other presents is precisely what both forms, and yet makes radically alienated from itself, the self. Mishima *performs* this stabilization/dangerous destablization of self/signified. The slippage between his own armpit, the representation of Saint Sebastian, and classmate Omi theatrically performs the slippage between self–other, same–different, that heterosexist interpellations of homosexuality defend against so that their hetero-ness can be firmly fixed, protected against any slippage toward homo-ness, in the consolidation of an imagined full cohesion of (the phallic) self.

But there is still more complexity in Mishima's formulations.

> It was not right that there was not another beautiful male in Yuichi's bed. A mirror was needed between him and the woman. Without help,

> success was doubtful for him. He closed his eyes and embraced the woman. In doing so he embraced his own body in his mind.
>
> In the dark room the two of them slowly became four people. The intercourse of the real Yuichi with the boy he had made Yasuko into, and the intercourse of the makeshift Yuichi – imagining he could love a woman – with the real Yasuko had to go forward simultaneously.
>
> (*Forbidden Colors*, 51)

In the passage just quoted, four people have replaced the "real" two: both Yasuko and Yuichi are split into manifestations that take on a significance, or an existence, in and through the desire of the other. Likewise as Yuichi ponders his "narcissism," he splits his manifestation as the object of Mrs Kaburagi's desire and as the homosexual Yuchan (the object of the entire Tokyo gay community's desire) into an object for his (other) self's desire. In this he is absolutely simultaneously himself, an "other," and his ideal ego.

> I can't love Mrs. Kaburagi, that's sure. For all I know I was in love with a second me, a beautiful young man with a beauty beyond possibility in this world, whom Mrs. Kaburagi loves so much . . . I am not Narcissus, he rationalized proudly. If I were in love with myself I might without difficulty see myself and the subject of that [Mrs Kaburagi's] letter as the same thing. But I am not in love with myself. That is why I fell in love with Yuchan [his "gay" name].
>
> (*Forbidden Colors*, 231)

Satō Hideaki speaks of the complexity of this erotic economy,

> While making communication with the other the fundamental principle, the love which conceals a desire to resemble the partner (*aite*) in actuality transcends the other, in effect (*itte shimaeba*) making a stepping-stone of the other, and [this love] has the psychology of seeking another self, doesn't it? If so, in this case "love" is, rather then *ren'ai*,[33] something that just collapses into what we should call love-of-self (*jikoai*) . . . Rather than Sebastian being the object of erotic love, "I" love [Sebastian] as the flesh that projects the "self." As has often been pointed out, here as well, one can take this as narcissism. However, correctly, this love, while embracing a narcissistic desire, because the flesh that should be loved *lacks* the self, the self is regarded as the same as the other. "My" desire has a complex mechanism and confronts the self in its true essence.[34]

Satō, I believe, is absolutely correct when he claims that Mishima is here struggling with the terms of subjectivity in and through the other that modern theory has understood as the essence of how the subject comes into being. And, in this configuration, the self regards itself as an "other." This is

so regardless of the fact that the "other" for Mishima is here also male. When Mishima's homosexual protagonists love, they love an other that is simultaneously the ego ideal of the mirror stage, which is also the consequence of the Other. Lacan wrote:

> As a specular mirage, love is essentially deception. It is situated in the field established at the level of the pleasure reference, of that sole signifier necessary to introduce a perspective centered on the Ideal point, capital I, placed somewhere in the Other, from which the Other sees me, in the form I like to be seen . . . *I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you – the* objet petit a *– I mutilate you*.[35]

(As I have already noted, the violent erotic fantasies of the protagonist of *Confessions* illustrate well the malevolence of narcissism, toward both the lacking self that falls short of the idealized ego, and the other, who is, like the subject, always also more than she/he is.)

Often, because in interpretations more essentialist or materialist than Lacan's own, "lack" may be perceived as bound up with some sort of genitalized difference. This is, I believe, an unnecessary framing of desire within heterosexist boundaries. I am arguing, following Butler, Edelman, and Deleuze/Guattari, that Lacan's schema of subjectivity and relation to the other need not be restricted by biological genitalia. After all, even in Freud the penis in and of itself signifies nothing as material object and only takes on its importance as phallus in terms of prohibition.[36] *That the self is sexed and that this is the source of difference is not negated by the homosexual articulation of desire*.

First apprehending the other as the means to apprehend the self, Mishima sought the gaze that would (hopefully) consolidate him. He wrote that in words "one will never succeed in getting at the essence of a reality that returns one's gaze. It was the opponent – the opponent that lurked in the empty space beyond the flash of the fist and the blow of the fencing sword, gazing back at one – that constituted the true essence of things. Ideas do not stare back; things do" (*Sun and Steel*, 37). For Lacan, and as I have summarized it throughout this study, the Gaze, however, is subject shattering, not consolidating. And indeed, Mishima's quest to consolidate the self in the other appears to have shifted. Unable to halt the slippage of the subject in the other, Mishima turned to the Other, the Real in its most real form: death. (This Real is also the impossibility posed by language, or the symbolic or radical alterity – and never actually *embodied* in an other.) So, Mishima concludes, "Ultimately, the opponent – the 'reality that stares back at one' – is death" (*Sun and Steel*, 42). In Mishima's configuration, the Other is next completely severed from any occupation of its locus by a subject. (Lacan held that the place of the Other is only *occupied* by, for example, the mother or the Other sex [which is always woman], and not

composed of those [inhabiting] subjects. The perception of the lack in the Other [occupied space of the Other] puts desire into motion.) In Mishima there is a subsequent (conscious?) *failure* (refusal?) in the standing-in of the other in the place of the Other.[37]

Mishima, in the end, as I have already argued, sought to fulfill his desire for death in a defiance of social discourse and sexual mores. On first glance, Mishima appears to have acted ethically in the Lacanian sense, that is, he chose his own death, contemplated it, and followed the desire that inhabited him. On closer examination, however, I am convinced that Mishima's suicide falls more accurately within the realm of the perverse act, or as Badiou might have put it, fidelity to the simulacrum.[38] First, if Zupančič is right in arguing that the ethical act must not be conflated with one that fulfills desire, but instead, it must reveal the infinity of the metonomy and deferral of fulfillment,[39] then Mishima's suicide cannot be ethical. This is because, even though it appears to transgress the law, he achieves his aim – that is, he does kill himself. Second, to quote Zupančič again, "while Antigone is a sublime figure, she is not by any means a subject who experiences the feeling of the sublime. She is not a subject who observes through the window (of fantasy) the spectacle of her own death."[40] Against this, Mishima's obsessive recounting of his own impending suicide in narrative text and myriad performances can certainly be described as an attempt to observe the spectacle of his own death as the sublime. (Even though his actual suicide obviously took him beyond the sublime.) Third, unlike the death drive that I have described, following Copjec, as inhibited in its (proper) activity, or a drive that is satisfied by not achieving its aim (which is death), Mishima's desire for death in the end was (obviously again) not sublimated. Fourth, it could be argued that Mishima's desire was not "truly" his own, but, as I have described it already, the negative and reactive inhabitation of the desire of the Other as law – in its various interpellations of Mishima as pervert and homosexual.[41]

10 The homosocial fixing of desire

However, there is another element revealed in Mishima's *Sun and Steel* that concerns me even more: *the repression of the erotic elements of the constitutively erotic drive toward death, or, its subordination to an ontological yet thoroughly politicized, mythic, community of the same*. The result is that for Mishima desire lost its potential for free-flow to become *fixed in a specific articulation* at this point. This is the perverse formula of "you shall experience *jouissance* in this fashion," an articulation that moreover was avowedly *ideologically* fascist in spite of its *political* impossibility given the social context of its emergence, dissemination, and expression. Matsumoto pointed out the obvious: in spite of the "subjective" nature of Mishima's literary resurrection of the emperor and endorsement of neo-fascism, literature can and frequently does, have social and political impact.[1] Moreover, his non-fictional essays certainly circulated as political documents, even if they were met primarily with ridicule. Before his suicide Mishima wrote a quasi-political manifesto explaining the Shield Society's objectives; he also wrote several articles explicating his now apparently politicized ideals (such as his "Bunka bōei ron"). In these texts, and in Mishima's *Sun and Steel*, unlike in *Patriotism*, the (constitutively) erotic drive toward death (the Real) is subordinated to a sort of politics. *Sun and Steel* appears to describe objectively the process of the first-person narrator's search for an authentic selfhood (in relation to, first, the other and finally, the Other) and a way to experience "authenticity" (to apprehend the Other) that led Mishima to the conclusion that it is only in death that authenticity can be experienced. (The sun, of course, must also be understood to be a metaphor for the emperor and the nation-state Japan.) The problem, which Mishima also clearly understood, was that actual apprehension of the Real meant the *actual* (real, biological) annihilation of the experiential subject. *Sun and Steel*, moreover, abruptly loses its analytic focus and intellectual rigor, to end in a romantic postulation of *a thoroughly homosocial, but here not explicitly homosexual* brotherhood of warriors as the only context into which the individual subject can be diffused and therefore fulfilled in death.

> Only through the group, I realized – through sharing the suffering of the group – could the body reach that height of existence that the individual alone could never attain. And for the body to reach that level at which the divine might be glimpsed, a dissolution of the individuality was necessary. The tragic quality of the group was also necessary – the quality that constantly raised the group out of the abandon and torpor into which it was prone to lapse, leading it on to ever-mounting shared suffering and so to death, which was the ultimate suffering. The group must be open to death – which meant, of course, that it must be a community of warriors.
>
> (*Sun and Steel*, 87)

Is it possible that this (terrorist, sadistic, yet masochistic) fixing of desire onto a community of the same is part of a challenge to the entire social structure based on heteronormativity or an aspect of homo-ness or gay desire, that Bersani has theorized as "a redefinition of sociality so radical that it may appear to require a provisional withdrawal from relationality itself"?[2] Using Edelman's thesis on sameness and otherness, I have argued that one effect of Mishima's gendered/sexual performances is a destabilization of heterosexist notions of (genitalized) desire in terms of a biological binarism of male/female. Bersani, however, has formulated an entirely different challenge to the same charge of "desire for the same" appended to explications of homosexual desire.

> Although there are valid grounds for questioning the assumption that desire between men, or between women, is desire for "the same," it is also true that because our apprenticeship in desiring takes place within that assumption, homosexuality can become a privileged model of sameness – one that makes manifest not the limits but the inestimable value of relations of sameness, or homo-relations.[3]

Shifting the tensions that inhere in narcissism to likeness (homology), Bersani argues that for the politically conscious, activist gay subject, a type of radical, other economy of desire can be enacted. This would be an economy in which desire's object is not another individual, but an anonymous stranger who, however, belongs to a community of the same (a homosexual community). This is appended to Bersani's celebration of masochistic positioning for men as a "subject dissolving" radicality,

> The person disappears in his or her desire, a desire that seeks more of the same, partially dissolving subjects by extending them into a communal homo-ness.
>
> Lack, then, may not be inherent in desire; desire in homo-ness is a desire to repeat, to expand, to intensify the same, a desire that Freud, with a courageously confessed perplexity, proposes as the distinctive

> characteristic of the sexual in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. The aim of desire grounded in lack is the filling of the lack through the incorporation of difference. The desire in others of what we already are is, on the contrary, a self-effacing narcissism, *a narcissism constitutive of community* in that it tolerates psychological difference because of its very indifference to psychological difference. This narcissistic subject seeks a self-replicating reflection in which s/he is neither known nor not known; here individual selves are points along a transversal network of being in which otherness is tolerated as the nonthreatening margin of, or supplement to, a seductive sameness.[4]

Indeed, a resolute community of the same and a "belongingness" to this community, which stands in radical opposition to the "real" *qua* social norm, is a theme throughout *Forbidden Colors*. The community is found in the parks that become cruising spots at night, the gay bars in the back rooms of bars, the private parties, and other locations.

> These are all my comrades, Yuichi thought as he walked. Rank, occupation, age, beauty notwithstanding, they are a fellowship welded by the same emotion – by their private parts, let us say. What a bond! These men do not have to sleep together. *From the day we were born we have slept together* . . . Closer than parent or child, more than wife, brother, or sister, they are my comrades . . .
>
> (56, 57)

This community is posited in contrast to the socially acceptable, purely homosocial bonds of mainstream society. Watching a (gay/closeted) singer well known among the gay community acting the role of a heterosexual in public, surrounded by women, behaving "straight" when greeting another man with a rough handshake, Yuichi complains, "They looked for all the world as if they were getting ready to fight" (97). He contrasts the behavior of the man in the scene with the one he recalls from the park,

> It was the diametrical opposite of that alliance of fellows in the park earlier in all their coquettishness, shoulders drawn together, big asses swinging as they walked. Because [his demeanor] was so completely opposite, incongruously (*kaette*), there was something analogous about it, something secretive like invisible ink that surfaced, as though touched by something unpleasant that was revealed from deep inside Yuichi as well. That's how Yuichi felt. A spiritualist would probably call it fate. The singer's empty, artificial coquetries directed at women, staking his whole life on this tension-filled absolute devotion to the efforts of his pitifully earnest performance of "manliness" was unbearably bitter to watch.[5]

In this community of the same and in the anonymity of sex after cruising, postulates Bersani, is a potentially radical alternative to the politics of sexual desire thoroughly subordinated to the economy of intimacy, relation and communication. Yuichi, first "set free" by the actualization of his desire, that is, sex with a man, soon becomes cold, calculating, and cruel toward his lovers. The desire of both Mishima's protagonists in *Confessions* and *Forbidden Colors* is split – between a desire for emotional intimacy and "normalcy" in a heterosexual relationship – and the desire for sex with (an ever changing roster of) men or boys. For both, sexual *desire* is severed from intimacy.

> Yuichi had already acquired the right to think: If only in the first night my love makes itself manifest, it would be no more dishonest to both me and my lover to repeat clumsy carbon copies of that first night. It will not do for me to judge my own sincerity by the sincerity of my lover, but the reverse of that. Perhaps my sincerity will take the form attained through an unlimited number of first nights spent with a succession of lovers encountered in turn. My constant love will be the common thread in the ecstasies of countless first nights, nothing other than the intense contempt of single encounters unchanging no matter whom I meet.
>
> (*Forbidden Colors*, 93)

Yuichi calls his desire "love" and feels, at least, affectionate warmth toward his (young, handsome) lovers, but nonetheless, as already noted, betrays each and every one of them, growing colder and crueler. The sweet romanticism of the protagonist's yearning for intimacy with a woman turns violent and murderous, divested of gentility or kindness in *Confessions*. Here sexual desire is incited by the protagonist's own body, his male classmates, strangers, pictures and photographs, and elaborate sadomasochistic fantasies. As a youth, he professes, "I had not the faintest idea that there was any connection between love and sexual desire" (114). "Love" for him is what he feels for Sonoko – that is, is divested of sexual love. Sexual desire, conversely, is divested of "love" and characterized instead by brutality.

> At this sight, above all at the sight of the peony tattooed on his hard chest, I was beset by sexual desire. My fervent gaze was fixed upon that rough and savage, but incomparably beautiful, body. Its owner was laughing there under the sun. When he threw back his head I could see his thick, muscular neck. A strange shudder ran through my innermost heart. I could no longer take my eyes off him.
>
> I had forgotten Sonoko's existence. I was thinking of but one thing: Of his going out into the streets of high summer just as he was, half-naked, and getting into a fight with a rival gang. Of a sharp dagger

> cutting through that belly-band, piercing that torso. Of that soiled belly-band beautifully dyed with blood. Of his gory corpse . . .
>
> (252)

Certainly, most of Mishima's representations of (homo)sexual/erotic desire are not for a kind, loving, reciprocal replication of the social ideals of heterosexual monogamous couplings. Sometimes desire is a furtive sadistic one for acquaintances from which this desire must be hidden; some are thoroughly anonymous and murderous desires for virile strangers. I have already borrowed several of Bersani's comments on Genet as instructive to a reading of Mishima. Bersani's critical and political validation of, or discovery of a positive aspect in the sadist is the addendum, of course, to his prior enthusiastic endorsement of the masochistic "bottom" as a politically radical challenge to the phallic subject. Bersani takes his argument for a radical alternative to social norms that tether sex to (familial or other) intimacy into far more radical, and certainly controversial ground when he interprets the celebration of Nazism and terroristic nihilism in Genet as a "fucking of the world" that stems, at least in part, from how discourses on homosexuality and sodomy have "interpellated" Genet into society. Against the "normal" social relations produced and demanded by heterosexualist economies, anonymous, sadistic "fucking" stands as a resistance to that economy. This is, in a sense, the returning of the Real to the arena of the masochistic theater.

> Our culture tells us to think of sex as the ultimate privacy, as that intimate knowledge of the other on which the familial cell is built. Enjoy the rapture that will never be made public, that will also (although this is not said) keep you safely, docilely out of the public realm that will make you content to allow others to make history while you perfect the oval of a merely copulative or familial intimacy. The sodomist, the public enemy, the traitor, the murderer . . . are ideally unsuited for such intimacies. Excluded from all triumphant communities . . . they are reduced, or elevated, to a kind of objectless or generalized ejaculation, a fucking of the world rather than each other.[6]

Mishima might be seen as having made "history" in a sense; certainly his "terrorism" and suicide were public acts. However, his *Sun and Steel*, as already noted, jettisons the sexual components of homosexual desire, replacing it with a resolute *homosociality*.

> What had eluded me was the tragedy of the group, of tragedy as a member of the group. If I had achieved identity with the group, participation in tragedy would have been far easier, but from the outset words had worked to drive me farther and farther from the group.

> The intuition of my intimacy – the intuitive sense that the group represented the principle of the flesh – was correct . . . in later years . . . I began to perceive the significance of the group.
>
> The group was concerned with all those things that could never emerge from words – sweat, and tears, and cries of joy or pain. If one probed deeper still, it was concerned with the blood that words could never cause to flow . . . The group must be open to death – which meant, of course, that it must be a community of warriors.
>
> (85, 87)

Even in his celebration of Nazism Genet refused all community, and his rendering of the so-called political was never divested of the sexual – hence, Bersani finds a radical alternative to the heterosexist economy of relation and intimacy. But Mishima, to the contrary, found his "ultimate" community in his farcical embrace of neo-fascism and the brotherhood of soldiers from which, I repeat, sexuality has been radically divested. Moreover, suddenly, he is using the word "intimacy" to discuss his relation to the homosocial group. Once again I want to borrow Bersani's words to think about Mishima,

> This is not a political program. Just as Genet's fascination with what he outrageously calls the beauty of Nazism is in no way a plea for the specific goals pursued by Nazi Germany, Erik and Riton are positioned for a reinventing of the social without any indication about how such a reinvention might proceed historically or what face it might have. *Funeral Rites* does nothing more – but I think it's a good deal – than propose the fantasmatic conditions of possibility for such a proceeding. It insists on the continuity between the sexual and the political, and while this superficially glorifies Nazism as the system most congenial to a cult of male power justified by little more than male beauty, it also transforms the historical reality of Nazism into a mythic metaphor for a revolutionary destructiveness which might surely dissolve the rigidly defined sociality of Nazism itself . . . Genet's political radicalism is congruent with a proclaimed indifference to human life as well as a willingness to betray every tie and every trust between human beings. This is the evil that becomes Genet's good, and . . . homosexuality is enlisted as the prototype of relations that break with humanity. . . .
>
> There may be only one reason to tolerate, even to welcome, *Funeral Rites* rejection . . . of relationality: without such a rejection, social revolt is doomed to repeat the oppressive conditions that provoked the revolt. . . . it is perhaps Genet's homosexuality that allowed him to imagine a curative collapsing of social difference into a radical homoness, where the subject might begin again, differentiating itself from itself and thereby reconstituting sociality.[7]

Mishima-as-corpus *began* in a trajectory mirroring that of Genet's: a radical nihilism that rejected relationalism for a reconstituted flow of perverse, unfettered, non-relational desire for the same/self/self-as-other, and other-in-self. But in the final texts – including *Sun and Steel*, "Bunka bōei ron," and his Shield Society coup and death-by-suicide – Mishima jettisoned fucking of any sort for (only) quasi-political posturing over a mythic community of a homosocial, not homosexual, sameness. To bring Deleuze back into the argument, Mishima's progression from word to body, from a literature of erotic homosexual and outlaw desire to one of homosocial, institutional desire is the shift from a masochistic economy of fantasy, imagination, and negation, to a sadistic one in which fantasy fuels action in the real world and disavowal replaces negation. Death, moreover, is finally reconfigured as (impossibly) *freed* of the abject. It becomes purely beautiful death; death that appears to deny its singularity through a dissolution of the self into a fraternity of warriors. Mishima seems to have shifted toward an embrace of a notion of community that is more like how Sakai has described Watsuji's philosophy of "human in-between" than it is a resolute, Genet-like, nihilist fucking of the world.[8] In place of Yuichi's aesthetic of betrayal, *Sun and Steel* expresses *trust* in the bonds between individual and group or thorough belongingness. Homosociality replaces radical sadistic/masochistic/anti-relational homosexuality. Unlike Kawabata, whose fascist complicity steadfastly avoided the Real, Mishima's embraced it. For both, the fascism, then, inheres in the manner in which the real – materiality, social law – is reinvented as subordinated to how they position themselves against the Real. In the end Mishima's radical gesture toward a liberation of desire from the dictates of the social collapsed into a capitulation to a socially acceptable homosocial matrix. In the process, the desire of the Other dictated his *jouissance*-in-death, and, unsublimated and perverse, Mishima became a fascist.

Epilogue

11 Scripting the scopic[1]

Disinterest in *Double Suicide*

The subject of this final chapter is Shinoda Masahiro's 1969 filmic adaptation of the 1721 puppet play (*bunraku*) by Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), *Shinjū ten no amijima* (*Love Suicides at Amijima*, English title: *Double Suicide*). Like Teshigahara, Shinoda was affiliated with the Japanese Art Theater Guild, a group of young filmmakers attempting to create political-aesthetical films in opposition to the dominant studio productions of the 1960s, that they viewed as commercial, inartistic, and uninteresting.[2] Released in the year before Mishima's suicide, *Double Suicide* makes its own comment on the future possibility for Japanese (loosely political) art. As I will elaborate, like Kawabata, Abe–Teshigahara, and Mishima, *Double Suicide* is interested in the problematic of desire and aesthetics in relation to "the real" (as social norm as well as simple materiality). As does *Woman in the Dunes*, *Double Suicide* highlights the *cruelty* (and institutionalized homosocial misogyny) of premodern Japan that is elided in purely aesthetical, posterior reconceptualizations of tradition. And like Mishima, the film gestures toward the Real in an attempt to break apart the limitations of a rigid (social) real. Unlike Mishima, however, the filmic economy of desire does not, I hope to show, collapse into a univocal, fascistic representation. Rather, as I will argue, it simultaneously epitomizes both a psychoanalytic ethics and a political one, thus evidencing the potential for the coexistence of the two ethics.

Double Suicide is a stunning employment of an Edo-period source text to problematize the binding of modern Japanese aesthetics to Japanese premodern convention – which has complicated most critiques of the modern subject in Japan – and to simultaneously denounce the Edo economy (and its modern filmic legacy) of women as commodified objects of exchange between men. In order to do so, the film relies on a specific filmic economy (and aesthetic) of "distancing" or "disinterestedness" that engenders a mode of the gaze quite different from the so-called male one. My discussion starts by mapping out the parameters of the origins of this disinterestedness and proceeds to a formal analysis of how the film's syntactical mobilization of disinterestedness results in a filmic gaze that decenters, rather than consolidates, the modern subject. Because the decentered subject is, however, deeply

referential to the Japanese premodern non-centered (non)subject, and because a sort of transcendence of the subject had already taken place prior to the twentieth century in Japan, throughout I highlight the complexity of the significance of this disinterested gaze for a cogent critique of the (gendered) subject in modern Japan.

Modes of disinterestedness

Double Suicide scorns conventions of filmic realism as it faithfully follows the puppet play text of star-crossed lovers, Jihei, a paper-seller, the courtesan Koharu, and Jihei's wife Osan, replacing puppets with human actors, alternating minimalist stage sets with location shots. Here is a brief synopsis: Jihei's passion for Koharu has led him to neglect his fiscal and other responsibilities to his wife and children. Tahei, a rich and despicable merchant, plans to redeem (purchase) Koharu for himself. Koharu swears she will kill herself instead. Unable to come up with enough money to buy Koharu himself, Jihei and Koharu pledge to die together. In despair Osan writes a letter to Koharu, as one woman to another, begging her to spare Jihei's life. Koharu yields to Osan's request, but Jihei interprets her change of heart as evidence of deceit. Word reaches Jihei and Osan that Koharu is about to be redeemed by Tahei. Realizing that Koharu is planning suicide, Osan tells Jihei of the women's agreement. She and Jihei feverishly set about turning assets into cash to redeem Koharu themselves. Before they can do so Osan's father, who has heard rumors of Jihei's infidelity and financial irresponsibility, arrives to demand divorce and physically removes Osan from her marital home. In the end, Koharu and Jihei die together.

One 1969 reviewer wrote that Shinoda had "extracted from Chikamatsu's original play the truly dramatic elements, and, by reconstructing these in the context of film according to contemporary sensibilities, marvelously rebirthed the Genroku [era] tragedy into the world of Showa's artistic apex (*genroku*)."[3] (Genroku refers to the apex of Edo-period cultural and artistic production, approximately 1680–1730. The Showa period spans 1926–1989.[4]) However, rather than an adaptation of the puppet play, as Audie Bock correctly put it, "Shinoda made a filmic analysis of the theatrical form of Bunraku."[5] His analysis relies in part on the translation of a traditional Japanese "mode" of disinterestedness into modern film syntax.

In *Double Suicide* both the political and aesthetic dimensions of the film depend on techniques of distancing, bearing some resemblance to the aesthetical structure of Kawabata's narrative gaze. In my discussion of Kawabata's "gaze," I linked disinterest to fascist ideology in its aesthetical celebration of beauty, the projected surface, and mythic image reactive to modern complexity. In the case of *Double Suicide*, I describe disinterestedness as indebted to several "modes" of detachment: Brechtian, Buddhist,

and aesthetics as a purified domain culled in part from Kant. This description, in turn, invites inquiries of a broader nature into the construction of the subject and its gaze in modern Japanese film.

Far more adamantly and obviously than *Woman in the Dunes*, *Double Suicide* frequently achieves perfectly the sort of alienation effect regarded by Brecht as the means to raise to a conscious level what would otherwise remain unconscious, as Hitomi Kakuhiko also noted in 1969. By employing various devices to render strange the familiar, the given, and the putatively natural, the spectator loses identification with the character and instead is compelled to think about the representation in its social or historical context. Ideally, to requote Brecht, this alienation effect should "demonstrate a custom which leads to conclusions about the entire structure of a society at a particular (transient) time."[6] In *Double Suicide*, the political dimension of disinterestedness is employed in the Brechtian sense to rupture viewer identification with characters as individuals and instead guide the spectators toward reading the social and political determinants of the represented circumstances – relentlessly destroying the diegetic effect of the film.

Because *Double Suicide* is set in the Edo period the aesthetic dimension of the film is also indebted to another mode of disinterest. *Double Suicide* is informed by a whole constellation of modern notions of Edo that collapse the aesthetics of the urban, merchant-class, popular Edo arts within the so-called higher, earlier aesthetics of Heian and Kamakura-Muromachi arts such as poetry, *no* theater, and calligraphy. That is, modern concepts of "Edo" tend to combine Edo "sensibilities" with a set of fragmentary simulacra of (transhistorically conceived) "Japanese aesthetical conventions" that condense into an imaginary unity once distinct and specific attributes of the arts.[7] Despite their otherwise radical differences, Steve Odin links a long list of premodern Japanese aesthetics by virtue of a shared "artistic detachment" rooted in Buddhist tenets, or what I have called disinterest.

> Traditional aesthetic ideals in the Japanese canons of taste – such as *aware* (melancholy beauty), *miyabi* (gracefulness) *yūgen* (profound mystery), *ma* (negative space), *wabi* (rustic beauty), *sabi* (simplicity), *fūryū* (windblown elegance), *iki* (chic) and *shibumi* (elegant restraint) – all contain an element of detached resignation . . . The emphasis on artistic detachment in Japanese *geidō* [the way of the arts] can be traced back to its origins in . . . the "*shikan* [tranquility meditation] aesthetic consciousness" . . . of the late Heian and early Kamakura [Buddhist] priesthood.[8]

The Buddhist-inspired, formal, and transcendental resignation to "what is" and the ideal of contemplative disengagement in meditation practices, which affected many artistic practices as well, necessitated a degree of disinterest, or a bracketing of the religious-aesthetical experience outside of

mundane, sociohistorical, or other contexts.[9] But, of course, it is only from the perspective of modernity that the disinterests attending the various "traditional aesthetic ideals" listed above by Odin appear alike in their differing manifestations.

Hence, the aesthetic disinterest of *Double Suicide* interweaves a sort of Brechtian political theatrics with citations or simulacra of traditional Buddhist detachment. But there is still more complexity to the film's employment of a disinterested aesthetics: like *Snow Country*, *Double Suicide*'s aesthetical dimension also draws heavily on Kuki's twentieth-century rearticulation of *iki*.[10] *Iki*, as I have already discussed it, designated an Edo-period eroticized aesthetic of distance, thematically and formally integral to the puppet theater among other Edo-period arts and aesthetic ideals. A radical exteriority was evident in the puppet theater because "the narrative voice is separated from the fictional locus of the speaking subject (the puppet's body in *ningyo joruri* [the text of the puppet theater])."[11] Such attributes of the puppet theater as the detachment of narrative voice from the "puppet subject" or the alternations of indirect and direct enunciation, fostered a mode of disinterest related to the lack of a subject, or a non-centered perspective.[12] The aesthetic ideal of Edo-period *iki* was indebted to this exteriority. It should be clearly noted, however, that when modern cinema, visual arts, or literature appear to replicate this non-centrality, or refuse to posit a unitary subject, it is of course now a de-centered or deconstructed subject; it cannot be a replication of non-centrality.

As I described it in the chapters on Kawabata, the aesthetic ideal of *iki* was employed by the early twentieth-century Japanese philosopher, Kuki, in an attempt to designate a sensibility and taste particular to Japan. This was part of a general cultural movement away from what was perceived as the excessive Westernization of early Meiji and an attempt to discover and articulate an alternate and "purely Japanese" aesthetics, values, and ethics. According to Kuki, *iki* had three fundamental aspects: *bitai*, *ikuji*, and *akirame* (coquetry, boldness, and resignation). Kuki's Meiji/Taisho notion of Edo-period *iki* included a valorization of an educated, moneyed male consumer's consumption of various "types" of sex-for-sale. Karatani wrote, "Kuki seeks to give a philosophic meaning to *iki* by means of a structural analysis of the different life-styles that developed in and around the pleasure quarters."[13] As I also stated in "Virgins and other little objects," like Heidegger's notion of "authentic being" and the German *Volk*, Kuki linked *iki* and national polity. Moreover, his "national body" bound culture to sensual experience.[14] Kuki also adapted such Kantian ideals as purposiveness without purpose and disinterestedness, writing, "*iki* . . . boldly brackets out practical, everyday life. Breathing in the neutralized air of a transcendental atmosphere, *iki* engages in autonomous play (*jiritsuteki yūgi*) without purpose (*mumokuteki*) or interest (*mukanshin*)."[15] Against Continental philosophic privileging of depth, *iki* celebrated the surface. Let me remind the reader that *iki*, according to Kuki, took material form in any

variety of aestheticized objects, from *geta* to thin, translucent cloth, but was best epitomized by the Edo-period courtesan; preferably a rather sad one with the experience of numerous betrayals. In its material focus on a certain style of commodity items (including prostitutes), *iki* is also inseparable from capital, and urbane consumption within a market economy. Thus let me redefine *iki* as, in part, an aestheticized, and disinterested, phallocentric economy that renders women into erotic objects of consumption. Kuki's utopianization of the prostitution district directly links the possibility of *iki* to the districts' radical disconnection with the real world.[16] Not only were geisha cloistered in gated quarters physically separated from other sections of the cities, but there were

> symbolic resemblances between the Edo pleasure quarters and the Kantian conception of aesthetics to which Kuki subscribed. Whether literally or figuratively, both represented sites of non-connectedness . . . [in the] real as well as the symbolic boundaries that separated the quarters from the world of ordinary concerns and official control . . . Once a customer passed through the gates that enclosed the quarters, he was delivered from the common nexus of social and economic necessity (providing, of course, he had sufficient wealth). Inside the gates, he devoted himself to play in a world radically stylized, down to its finest details.
>
> Over this . . . Kuki mapped what he imagined to be the spiritual contours of Japanese culture.[17]

The aesthetic is "transcendentalist" because it requires that the object (the woman), and the subjective response to that object, be bracketed out of temporal-historical context. But one of *iki*'s quintessential symbols and means was a biological – real, flesh and blood – woman bracketed off from context as though she were an art work. That for Kuki the animate facilitator of the male subject's experience of *iki* is most frequently a female body is no doubt linked to the early Meiji institutionalization of compulsory heterosexualism and the elevation of women to previously inconceivable positions of varied social value.[18] It rather neatly contradicts the Meiji-period feminist slogan "*onna mo hito nari* (women are people too)," by refusing the aestheticized female body autonomy and subjectivity, at the same time as it adores, and therefore mimes, an appreciation of female beauty.

As I also stated in the discussion of Kawabata, I believe that Kuki's notion of *iki* (that, it is important to remember, is his twentieth-century invention that incorporates his imaginary of Edo culture) evolved in fraternity with other factors (including Buddhist detachment and twentieth-century Zen) into a modern valorization of a disinterested gaze in film and other arts. This "disinterested" gaze is, however, to reiterate, constitutively eroticized – frequently elicited by the prostitute's body –

clearly distinguishing it from high Kantian disinterestedness. This gaze is also linked (sometimes only covertly) to a national imaginary and implicated in a particularized and culturally exceptionalized narrative and filmic gaze. Unlike *Snow Country*, *Double Suicide* cites, I think in order to critique, this modern reformulation of *iki* for complicity with an essentialized and homosocial, transhistorical notion of Japanese "culture," which also relies on a commodification of the Japanese female erotic body as the repository of tradition.

Thematically, *Double Suicide* overtly condemns *iki*'s economy of women as erotic commodity. As in the original play, the women are portrayed with sympathy, as the victims of a harsh and unfair patriarchal system. However, there is also an implicit criticism of the weakness of protagonist Jihei (as there is in the original play) because, in part, he lacks *iki*. That is, he is guilty of too much passion for his courtesan-lover. Moreover, it is easy enough to describe how each of the three attributes of *iki* – coquetry, resignation, and valor – are conversely embodied by both *female* characters in the play.

But why would Shinoda make such a film in 1969?[19] The reader should be reminded that in the mid-1960s Japanese film had entered an era in which the so-called "pink film" ascended, far eclipsing non-erotic dramas in sales and audience attendance. These films overwhelmingly relied on eroticized depictions of women for their popularity.[20] *Double Suicide*'s critique of the spectacularization of women as erotic commodity thus had significance in its contemporaneous filmic context. But more integral to this chapter, the formal dimensions of the film itself are precisely a modern filmic reformulation of the disinterest that is at the core of the modern aesthetic that Kuki tried to describe through recourse to the Edo-period term *iki*. A *gendered* analysis of the film suggests that in *Double Suicide* the political-aesthetical gaze has its roots in this reinvention of *iki*.

In *Double Suicide* disinterestedness, both political and aesthetic in function, is most evident in *how the film is shot*. Distance is established through the manipulations of time and space that are the backbones of film syntax, that is, in the montage (the linking of shot to shot) and in the *mise-en-scène*, or the spatial arrangement of the shot. It is also established in the guise of the gaze. The gaze is erotic yet reserved (it incites desire yet simultaneously withholds satiation). At the same time as *Double Suicide* is thematically sympathetic to the exchange of women as commodity, the courtesan nonetheless formally operates as a deeply aestheticized, erotic spectacle marked by disinterestedness.

It is also important to stress that although Shinoda's gesture is clearly a modernist one, it is not a confrontational reaction against an existing hegemony of a system of representation that privileges realism, structured around a specific convention of perspectivalism – that is, an autonomous, bourgeois subject who surveys a world of objects from a putatively universal

vantage point. Indeed, this is what the film is about on one level. Shinoda's choice of a puppet play script-as-origin suggests that at least in part, he was concerned with the changing representation of subjectivity in the arts. It has been repeatedly argued that for Japanese art and literature, modern subjectivity and its system of representation, was only "discovered" in Meiji, to be quickly rejected in favor of a perspectivism that is overtly referential to – while obviously not a replication of – a premodern non-subject oriented one.[21]

As Karatani has so convincingly shown, by the end of the nineteenth century Japan had already completed a sort of deconstruction of *ri* (principle or reason).[22] Characterized by a radical exteriority, Edo was a world of "pure surface, one devoid of all meaning and interiority."[23] Karatani adds: "The structure of *iki* enters into this category . . . What stubbornly resisted the 'modernization' of Japanese thought and literature in the twentieth century was not simply a premodern sensibility but a mode of thought which in some senses had already transcended the modern. This naturally took the form of a citation of the anti-Western elements of Western thought."[24]

Thus, the modern critique of the subject is haunted by the prior transcendence of the subject in Edo. Further complicating such a critique, in many popular and nativist discourses on the Japanese arts (literature, visual arts, theater and even film), Edo exteriority is mapped onto Heian Buddhist detachment which together have come to signify a transhistorical, continuous "Japaneseness" and "Japanese aesthetics." Frequently the radical non-centrality of the subject of the premodern arts or the decentered citation of it in 1920s and 1930s Japanese cinema (that is so often interpreted as tradition itself rather than its simulacrum) instead functions as an affirmation of Japanese (transhistorical) particularism. Even if the modern Japanese distaste for structure is differentiated from the premodern non-centrality, what might this mean for interpreting the (filmic) gaze?[25] North American and Western European critics writing about early Japanese cinema have well described how filmmakers such as Mizoguchi Kenji, Naruse Mikiso, and Ōzu Yasujirō offered radical perspectives on space, time, and subject in a filmic syntax different from dominant "Western" codes. In particular, their *mise-en-scène* frequently decentered and blocked spectators' clear frontal views of characters, limiting apprehension of intrafilmic gazes and decentering filmic subjects as subjects in other ways as well.[26] If the subject is decentered in many, although certainly not all, films, then from where would a gaze like the panoptic (or male) one operate in its so-called masterful dominance?[27] Japanese modern artistic perspectivalism (as deployed in *Double Suicide*) thus has interesting potential significance for the analysis of the so-called filmic gaze. It is important to bear in mind that this has nothing to do with the modern perspectivalism that was obviously necessary for the development of twentieth-century Japanese sciences and technology.

That such perspectivalism was easily acquired in these areas makes it all the more clear that the ongoing artistic insistence on a perspectivalism that looks like a premodern one is a construct indebted to ideologies of Japanese culturalism.

Modern discourses on Japanese aesthetics tend to refer even contemporary artistic temperament and style to a putatively ahistorical and particular "essence" that is irrational and ultimately untheorizable (because it is surplus to linguistic systems), yet somehow intuited by all Japanese.[28] Shinoda's "modernism" looks like North American and Western European modernist works in its "ironic" (self-reflexive/self-referential)[29] rejection of realist conventions. This irony, however, is less about dismantling a Cartesian perspectivism (that, it may be argued, never dominated Japanese arts), but laments an artistic stalemate that results from the insistent binding of modern Japanese arts to the premodern in discourses on Japanese aesthetics, both within and outside of Japan.[30] In fact, Brett de Bary has argued that in his critical writings Shinoda himself employed the terms "Japan" and "Japanese filmmaking" to designate a premodern "site of difference and defamiliarization" from the modern.[31]

An example of the cultural tautology of modern discourses on Japanese art (and subjectivity itself) can be found in Norman Bryson's 1988 essay on the modern gaze in Japanese art. He seeks to explicate the notions of visuality theorized by the modern Japanese philosopher Nishitani Keiji (1900–90) by employing the fifteenth-century Zen-inspired artistic technique of "flung ink" as the quintessential illustration of a Japanese visual field of emptiness. In this void, because subject and object alike are "deframed" both temporally and spatially, "the flung ink embodies . . . the subject's renunciation of a central subject position, on a field of radical emptiness where the last remains of the cogito are rendered null and void, literally cast out on empty air."[32] Leaving aside the obvious criticism that it is impossible to "renounce" a position that does not exist (thus an inappropriate concept regarding fifteenth-century Japan, in which one should call it the "non-centered" [non] subject), the question remains: What is the relation of this "non-centered" subject to modern Japanese filmic aesthetics? Or, more precisely, what does it mean to transpose this transhistorical notion to the modes of reproduction, image, and consumption that are film? Shinoda's analysis brings out the tensions that are disavowed or repressed in aesthetic discourses that equate these two discrete epistemic constellations – one constellation being the premodern puppet play, its text, the circumstances of its performance, and its puppets-as-characters, and the other, modern cinema, interiority, and spatial and temporal boundlessness.[33] In *Double Suicide* puppet theater functions as a citation within the film that foregrounds the problematic of the subject itself, as well as its representation-construction in film, most compellingly, in the guise of the gaze. *Double Suicide* seems to warn, as Karatani has repeatedly argued, that any critique of the subject in modern Japan is in danger of being

collapsed within a tautology of cultural particularism, which in Japan is already coded with the decentered subject.

Scripting the scopic

One striking thematic and *mise-en-scène* feature of *Double Suicide* that facilitates the aura of disinterestedness is the domination of the film's visual economy by the orthographic – or the mediation of the visual narrative by writing and the written text.[34] This writing is both graphic and visual (splitting the field between types of signs), and simultaneously a specific and unseen, yet known and unalterable text – the script-as-origin – that controls the film. Throughout the film, letters, in the forms of missives and orthographic symbols, control the characters. The original playscript's rhetorical conceit of punnings, polysemy, and play centered on words having to do with "paper" is turned visual. It is a written text – Osan's letter to Koharu begging her to spare Jihei's life – that mobilizes the conceit of obligation between women and propels the narrative. The discovery of the letter is highlighted when the film narrative pauses to have a *kuroko* (black-robed and masked stagehands in Kabuki, puppeteers in the puppet theater) bring the letter to the camera for a close-up reading by the audience. The written text is also accented by the letters splashing the background of numerous sets, Jihei's livelihood (he is a paper-seller), Osan's father's request for divorce papers, Jihei's letter swearing he has reformed, as well as in the first scene of Jihei and Koharu together, as she shuffles through and flings to the ground slips of papers that are the pledges that need to be repaid for her to be freed from her service as a courtesan. *Double Suicide* overturns the logic that insists that the written text be suppressed, so that the visual text may achieve its fullest diegetic effect. Instead, the origin is repeatedly disinterred and it subordinates the visual to its insistent presence. It is through the writing that the puppet play characters come into being, that is, they come-into-being in language. Moreover, this subject-in-language is subject to the law that is the script and its temporal and spatial limitations. These "laws" cannot be transgressed: "it is written." Persistently the film-subjects struggle to change the story, the temporal progression, spatial confines, even the tragic ending. But inevitably the premodern (in the forms of the script and the conventions of the puppet theater itself) returns *as law* to triumph over the movement toward "something else."

The scripted in this instance is "origin," not only concretely as textual source, but also metaphorically. In the twentieth century puppet drama has been canonized as one signifier of a pure, Japanese premodern aesthetics informed by a mode of disinterestedness as I have described it. The puppet play, one of many medieval/early modern multi-media performative genres in which music, lyric, speech, gesture, and other signifiers combine, originated as a lower (merchant) class performative art that reached its creative heights in the Genroku period. Then, according to Donald Keene,

culture was centered on the prostitution district. There, rich merchants "could buy the favors of the most beautiful women of the day, and a host of lesser courtesans awaited the call of less affluent men . . . The [puppet and other] theaters, associated directly or indirectly with the licensed quarters . . . were similarly swayed by the tastes of the merchants."[35] And, of course, *iki* had its roots in the prostitution quarters as well. In the 1960s, puppet drama thus evoked overlapping imaginaries intertwining the aesthetic of *iki*, early modern consumer culture, and an economy of women as erotic commodity.

The opening black and white documentary-style montage sequence shot backstage in a puppet theater is accompanied by a voiceover narration by director Shinoda and scriptwriter Tomioka Taeko, discussing how and where they plan to shoot the final scene of the lovers' suicides. The visuals are supplementary or contingent to, rather than continuous with, the voice-overs. This disjunction of visuals and speech/sound is intercut with shots of Shinoda on the phone, in which enunciation matches visuals in conventional synchronous sound. Employing a variety of shot angles, the montage sequence also alternates medium shots and close-ups of a puppet and a puppeteer manipulating the puppet. The camera is hand-held and moving freely. The strain of tensions between the boundedness of the puppet play – the confines of the genre – and the limitlessness of cinema are immediately apparent. The puppet play is spatially confined to a stage set and temporally bound to its performance. The story is already determined. The outcome is decided. The lines are written. There can be no substantive innovations, only variations on the presentation of the existing material. Shinoda and Tomioka's voiceovers insist that the cemetery location symbolizes infinity; the rigid finality of death is paired with eternity or filmic spatiotemporal liberties. The final scene of the puppet play, discussed in these very first moments of the film, is formally known as the *michiyuki*. It is a travel passage that strings together place names and hastens the tempo of the narrative as doomed lovers move spatially and temporally toward their deaths-by-suicide. Frequently, as in the case of *Double Suicide*, the doomed lovers were a courtesan and a married man or a poor man unable to purchase her contract for himself or else two lovers (otherwise) unsuited by class. Through their togetherness in death they defied the socially impossible terms of their love affair. The *michiyuki* is, moreover, inextricable from literary impulse: it is the *michiyuki* that provides the poetic and emotional apex of the play.

In his voiceover, however, Shinoda insists that the film must replace the beautiful words of the *michiyuki* with visuals. (Replacing the classic text with modern artistic representation dominated by the scopic.) Following the opening sequence just described, there are a few lines of poetry narrated in classical diction and a cut to a white screen on which thick, black letters in calligraphic script fade in and dissolve, one into the next, to spell out the film title (which is also the puppet play title). During these graphics an

off-screen narrator chants Chikamatsu's name and the play title. The very first minutes of the film thus foreground the question of the relationship of the classical script to its modern scopic translation. The written text is also present in the occasional replacement of everyday modern Japanese dialogue sequences with voiceover narration of lines from the play text, read in classical diction and rhythmic chant. An example immediately precedes the *michiyuki* sequence. There is a full follow shot of a *kuroko* (his back to the camera) chanting a few lines of poetry from the play's *michiyuki* segment. The camera cuts to a reverse field, frontal, medium close-up as he continues to narrate; now the camera is hand-held and circles around the *kuroko*, followed by a cut to Jihei and Koharu heading toward the bridges that symbolize crossing over into the other world. However the filmic adaptation strains to free itself from the fetters of the originary script, the already-written events, and the inevitable suicides, the script invariably triumphs and reasserts itself as dominant. The visual cannot supplant the script; it simply re-enacts it in a different format.

The most emphatic and ironic conceit of *Double Suicide* is the relentless filmic focus on the *kuroko* in their *bunraku* role as masked and unmasked puppeteers and doubling in their *kabuki* role as stagehands who manipulate the sets during the performance in full view of the audience. In the film, the *kuroko* handle props, move and change backdrops, and otherwise interact with the actors in practically every scene. The *kuroko* go beyond their conventional roles by guiding the characters firmly and relentlessly through the scripted scenes. Frequent close-ups frame and center the black figures, providing the viewer with detailed images, eyes visible behind their gauzy black veils, an intimate gaze that is impossible in the theater. Commonly interpreted as "the hands of fate,"[36] the *kuroko* are also simply "time," depicting the inevitable movement of the subject through time (the objectified subject-in-time). The *kuroko* index the temporal limitations of the puppet play, performed in "real time" before an audience. They rescue the filmic temporal "drag" by firmly redirecting and hastening the action along its scripted course toward death.

The *kuroko* also function as intrafilmic gazers; it is thus an embodied rather than abstracted (absented) gaze. Simultaneously, albeit contradictorily, the *kuroko* are gazers who are already non-subjects, symbolized by the translucent, black garments that signify an absented presence. They look where we will look in the cut to follow. Their gaze guides the viewer firmly. Yet there is nothing passive about the *kuroko*'s gaze. It is thoroughly invested in the progression of event; they gaze, and their gaze appears (to the gazing audience) to measure the flow of event against the constraints of time in an assurance that the scripted is properly and in timely fashion enacted. The *kuroko* gaze is thus intimately connected to mastery, but this mastery is that of a semiotic system and not that of an individuated subject.[37] The *kuroko* gaze is also linked to the formation of the puppets-as-subjects, who are, after all, "animated" by their puppeteers, but places a

rift between the *kuroko* and the passively observing viewer. This effectively splits the viewer: like the *kuroko* she knows the outcome, like the protagonists, she is subject to the *kuroko*'s control of time, space, and adherence to text. Yet ironically, the *kuroko* themselves are no more free of the script: their control of the actors amounts to advancing the requirements of the scripted in its filmic time-space. It is the illusion of mastery only.

Rather than unproblematically ("naturally") taking their place in time, the characters of *Double Suicide* are therefore overtly brought into being-in-time by the *kuroko*. Where then, one might wonder, is the interiorized subject of modern film, the subject with the illusion of presence, the subject who speaks, the subject who owns the male gaze? Puppet plays, as Sakai has argued, have nothing to do with modern notions of the subject and interiority.

> The subjects of enunciation and enunciated are never the same in the Text of the Japanese puppet theater. The narration is conducted solely by the chanter; he monopolizes the voice. Since puppets are, after all, what Chikamatsu Monzaemon called *deku* (pieces of wood), the actors never speak. It is not feasible to ascribe the voice of a character directly to the actual utterance of an actor. Because of this fundamental limitation, the Text of *ningyo joruri* [puppet play text] plainly indicates an irredeemable disparity between the enunciation and the enunciated, thereby debunking any humanistic ideological "frame up" by which the subject of the enunciated might ultimately seem to coincide with the subject of enunciation, the myth of subjective interiority.[38]

The act of citing puppet drama in modern filmic form thus potentially functions as a radical displacement and decentering of the modern subject (but should not be confused with, because it obviously cannot be a replication of, the Japanese premodern non-centrality). The film's Brechtian use of disinterest in conjunction with the filmic references to the erotic disinterest of *iki* and to Buddhist detachment foreground the tensions between the different epistemic systems (modern and premodern), making the two disjunctive rather than, as so commonly imagined, continuous and harmonious.

Gazing disinterestedly

That Koharu and Osan are played by the same actress challenges any attempt to see them as interiorized individuals, stressing instead the characters' social and historical significance. Although it replicates the *kabuki* practice of having a single actor play more than one role in the same play, by transposing this custom to film, where one would expect two actresses, it functions to critique the arbitrary and oppressive splitting of women into two irreconcilable roles of wife or erotic object. Simultaneously,

the human actors' presentational acting techniques remind the viewer consistently that here, actors have replaced puppets, in a reversal of the progression from exteriority to subjective interiority. Under high contrast lighting – reminiscent of stage spotlights – the actors' movements replicate those of puppets, with ritualized gestures of grief and seduction. Sudden, intense sobs just as suddenly cease. Scenes dominated by such ritualized depictions of emotions and presentational-style acting yield here and there to more realistic (modern) scenes. This is most conspicuous in the two tender, erotic, yet discreet, lovemaking scenes (that are nowhere in the original play script), in which close-ups on Koharu's face exhibiting sexual pleasure during apparent orgasm dominate. In these scenes the focus on Koharu is firmly in keeping with employing the woman as erotic spectacle, and the discreet nature of the depictions gives her dignity, distance, and subtlety, as required of the aesthetic. However, importantly, it is in these scenes that one can discern a fissure in the inherent phallocentrism of the aesthetic as Kuki perceived it. In both instances, the portrayal of sex between Koharu and Jihei consists primarily of Jihei, in a sense servicing Koharu, giving her pleasure through oral sex. It is not, strictly speaking, reciprocal. The pleasure is his in giving and hers in receiving. Moreover, here the *kuroko*'s omnipresence is downplayed. They are nowhere to be seen in the first lovemaking scene. But their ominous presence returns for the second one. Jihei and Koharu's last night together in a cemetery is attended by a cut from a close-up of them locked in an embrace to a long shot revealing a *kuroko* overseeing their activities from a platform above them, guiding our gaze back to the couple in the subsequent shot that is clearly the *kuroko*'s point of view.

The spectator's momentary illusion that she is on her own, that the scene will open at her will to her desiring gaze, is quickly dispelled. After brief full shots of the couple, the camera resists the desire of the viewer to behold the love scenes freely, favoring close-ups on Koharu's face in both scenes. The spectator is not permitted to peruse the scene (or bodies) at will. For their first embrace synchronous sound is replaced by the percussive, asynchronous soundtrack. We can see Koharu's moans of pleasure, but cannot hear them. The second love scene begins with synchronous sound of the couple's voiced pleasure. As their passion escalates, synchronous sound is replaced once more by the soundtrack, firmly distancing the spectator. Desire to see and hear on the part of the viewer is ultimately frustrated. (Desire is stoked and maintained through restraint, reminiscent of Kuki's notion of *iki* the gaze is neither omniscient nor empowered.) It does not replicate the viewer's Imaginary by which the subject sees not only itself reflected, but also a reflection of itself as the master of everything it sees. On the contrary, it shatters the illusion of viewer identification and viewer control in keeping with the Lacanian notion of the gaze.

Obviously, the opening sequence announces quite clearly that what will follow is a "production," shattering its potential diegetic effect even before

it can be formulated by the spectator. Throughout the film, characters (especially protagonist Jihei) are repeatedly decentered and obscured, either by facing away from the camera so that the spectator can neither see their expression nor follow their gaze or by being partly out of frame or blocked by other objects within frame, disallowing any putative mastery in spectatorial gaze. Characters cannot be constructed as subjects; their gaze is extra-filmic, withheld from the spectator.

In this way Shinoda replicates the idiosyncratic refusal of those conventions by earlier masters already mentioned, such as Mizoguchi, about whom David Bordwell wrote, this "refusal to let us see the characters' expressions, gestures, and glances forces us to read the scene as staging a relationship between agents with defined social roles."[39] I remind the reader that Bordwell argued that while a Wyler or Welles film depicts narratives about specific individuals, Mizoguchi's scenes commented on society rather than individuals, "saying" for example: "A woman is bargained for, An aristocrat insults a samurai. This line of inquiry suggests that the Japanese cinema . . . offers an instance of the Oriental sign's capacity for political functions."[40]

In *Double Suicide*, the radical obscuring of the gaze alternates with conventional film syntax and progression based on the exchange of clearly visible intrafilmic gazes that guide the spectatorial one. Thereby the difference between the two modes of representation is stressed even more strongly, one mode citing the premodern (the non-centered exteriority of the non-subject), the other fully modern and interiorized. *Double Suicide*'s gaze thus similarly brings, in fine Brechtian fashion, the sociocultural determinants to the foreground of signification: the constraints of class; the economy of women as erotic commodity; the arbitrary splitting of women into separate constructs of wife/prostitute; the feminized, essentialized, and transhistorical cultural imaginary of Japanese arts and convention.

Bringing to mind the importance of space in Abe and Abe–Teshigahara's explorations of human subjectivity and ethics, Shinoda's film syntax also problematizes the dominant modern mode of weighting time in the construct of the subject. In an obvious tribute to filmmaker Ōzu, whose rejection of the syntactic codes of classic American film is perhaps the most radical among the Japanese directors, Shinoda here and there borrows Ōzu syntactical-signatures, such as lingering "environmental" shots emptied of human presence. Another example is his use of montage sequences of rooftops to signal spatial transition in place of the convention of fade-out and in. As Noël Burch, Kristin Thompson, and Bordwell have argued, these sorts of transition shots, emptied of human subjects and that sometimes have nothing to do with establishing location, relativize the Hollywood convention that insists on narrative and causal signification as shot justification.[41] In *Double Suicide*, not only do the *kuroko* produce the subject-in-time, but the sets appear to produce the subject-in-space. And yet, as can be argued about Ōzu's films, space (clearly constructed as a representation of absent presence)

operates as its own signifier, here and there as subject itself supplanting the dominance of the human subject.

One sequence in *Double Suicide* begins with a fade-in of a medium shot of a paper lantern, announcing a new location with conventional optics, but lacking a standard establishing shot. The new location is obviously a stage set. Behind the lantern is a *shōji* (paper and wood lattice) screen, and because the shot angle is straight on, the image appears flat, lacking depth-of-field. Several human figures walk into the frame and cross paths in both directions between the lantern and the *shōji*, bringing depth to the image. Jihei enters the frame from the left and the camera tracks him horizontally. The spectator's view is obscured by a long row of horizontal and vertical wood beams in between the camera and Jihei. Amidst a crowd of people moving in all directions, to the persistent asynchronous percussive, somewhat atonal notes of the soundtrack (a modern score evocative of temple gongs), Jihei walks behind the beams and in front of theatrical backdrops, which include a huge brush and ink *ukiyo-e* style rendering of a courtesan (indicating that he is in the prostitution quarter). A few cuts cross the 180-degree action axis, so that Jihei appears to be walking back and forth, changing directions through throngs of people, rather than in a linear direction. A sudden cut centers a *kuroko* blowing out the lantern flame. In the subsequent shot the throngs of people take another step and then freeze. Only Jihei continues to move, small in the upper right of the screen, threading his way through the stock-still crowds, making his way toward the *kuroko* who is out of frame. The camera cuts to the *kuroko* who now holds a candle in his hand, and afterwards to Jihei approaching, and subsequently following the candle flame as though mesmerized by it. The percussive music picks up tempo and volume. Jihei is led past several scenes of "frozen" actors depicting courtesans and their clients (that thus in turn replace the backdrop painting of the courtesan). The soundtrack slows and quiets. There is a cut to the *kuroko* gazing off-screen. The next shot reveals the *kuroko*'s point of view: a small group of other *kuroko* in front of the *ukiyo-e* painting of the courtesan that Jihei had passed by previously. The *kuroko* disband and depart the scene, revealing Koharu and Jihei, who they had blocked from spectatorial view. It is as if Jihei, led by the *kuroko*, is gazing at himself. He is impossibly both gazer and the object of that gaze. He sees himself as "spectacle." Here, Jihei's gaze toward the other turns out to be turned into and back on itself: he sees himself as an other, or perhaps, he sees the other as himself.

The freeze shot employed in the sequence just described is a theatrical one that contrasts with another that occurs later: a filmic freeze frame. After Osan has been taken from Jihei, his weeping erupts in high-pitched, fervent wails. Paper-seller Jihei turns his rage against the items in his household, seizing and flinging handfuls of paper into the air; papers that remind the spectator of the already-scripted playscript itself. A freeze frame stills the papers in mid-air for several seconds and action returns in slow

motion as Jihei knocks down the flimsy paper and wood stage representations of walls around him. The "walls" only give way to a second stage set beyond the first; expansion of space simply reveals another artificial enclosure. All attempts to halt the temporal progression of the narrative (and to abort the written script) and to rethink the spatial limitations yield their ever-enduring bonds. Spinning the new set-wall (a common way of changing the set to announce a new location in puppet theater), Jihei steps out of frame and set simultaneously. The backside of the set-wall is shimmery paper simulating water. This shot dissolves into a location shot of flowing water. The theatrical set sequence is preceded and followed by location shots. These alternations of filmic and theatrical conventions interfere with any attempt at spectator identification and facilitate a conscious rendering of the (unconscious) process of suture in which the viewer must sew up the lack in the image with the projection of an image of the self constructed in language (that is, both lack and the covering over of that lack, are displayed on the filmic surface).[42] Not only is one constantly reminded that this is a production, an artistic rendering, but the juxtapositioning of filmic locations with theatrical sets destroys the illusion of realism that might otherwise attend the location sequences, by revealing that locations are merely another type of stage set. Or, on another level, just as one might feel tears coming to one's eyes in empathy with the lovers' plight the spell of identification is broken by a line of script or a jerky puppet-like movement, or some other aspect of the classical text and play that appear somehow ridiculous in the context of modern diegetic space. Instead of attempting to disguise the absence (lack) that is the "reality" of filmic representation, in *Double Suicide*, any suggestion that there existed a subject of the enunciation (i.e., the puppet-as-subject) will be abruptly countered by a revelation of the "emptiness" of that subject (it is just a disembodied [absent] representation of an actor standing in for a temporarily animated puppet). As previously noted, Shinoda's "analysis" intersperses the language of the original script and its voiceover narrations with actors' enunciations in which they speak for themselves, sometimes in deviation from the scripted text. Because these moments of filmic realism are paired so relentlessly with irony, the lack that is hidden in realistic films is emphasized and the viewer is forced to recognize and negotiate the film's Symbolic, rather than Imaginary, mechanisms and production of subjectivity. In spite of the medium chosen by Shinoda (film) and its potential to mime reality, *Double Suicide* puts into play the radical exteriority of the puppet theater and its representation in film, thereby rendering the process of suture conscious, and by extension, problematizing the very critique of the subject. That is, it suggests a movement toward a sort of historicization.

The film thus lends itself to the following interpretation: through the medium of modern scopic reproduction (film), Shinoda seems to be asking, what does it mean that even in 1969, both in Japan and in non-Japanese discourses about Japan, Japanese artistic expression is overwhelmingly bound,

either by intent or by interpretation, to the conventions of premodern subjectivity and its representations in art and culture? And how can a cogent critique of the modern subject be formulated in the context of modern Japan, where, as I already stated, a decentering of the subject is readily appropriated into discourses on Japanese exceptionalism? Discourses like Bryson's (as already cited) block any attempts to rethink the modern, as does the puppet play text and its temporal and spatial limitations in *Double Suicide*. The written, premodern text-as-law triumphs again. Although Shinoda's film's changing narrations evoke the classical puppet play's narrative dispersal and the classical script intrudes into the visual representations, the film, its aesthetic disinterestedness, and its decentering of the subject must not be confused with the puppet play itself, or a premodern "non-centered" (non)subject-oriented drama. *Double Suicide* must be understood as a late 1960s commentary on Japanese performative arts and aesthetics that employs ironic citations of classical narration interspersed with interiorized utterances (in which the characters' enunciations deviate radically from the "original" script). This point did not escape the review written by Hitomi at the time of the film's release. *Double Suicide*'s gaze cannot be analyzed purely within the puppet play itself. To do so would be to suggest that twentieth-century Japanese art be explicated through recourse to premodern systems of representations. Shinoda's film, I believe, makes the discontinuities between the two systems – or epistemic constellations – apparent.

In the 1960s Japan saw the explosion of avant-garde explorations of the possibilities of cinema and theater alongside student riots, left-leaning anti-American sentiments, and other citizen and popular protests. Ōe and other young writers rebelled against reviving Japanism. Much artistic energy was channeled into filmmaking. As did others of his generation, Shinoda sought to rediscover the Japanese origins of the Western European and North American avant-garde, as well as to critique modern subjectivity. Earlier, Brecht, Pound, and other modernists had marshaled the Japanese premodern arts as a radical challenge to modern perspectivism and as a means to make social and political commentary on contemporary conditions. As I have discussed it throughout this chapter, the problem for Shinoda and others of his generation, however, is that unlike for the North American and Western European modernists, such a gesture could not radically "shock" the Japanese spectator, because it did not amount to an encounter with either the "stranger" or even the Other. Rather, it felt like an encounter with the familiar, although potentially unsettling, past self (as formulated in the present). Moreover, the incessant binding of all Japanese aesthetics, transhistorically, to the premodern prevents movement toward "something else."

Double Suicide thus seems to be a film about an impossible dilemma: how can Japanese modern art critique the subject and its representation in art, especially when, as Karatani has argued, the subject had already been in

some sense transcended in the Edo period? Taking the dilemma further, how can a critique of the subject have meaning for political commentary or activism? *Double Suicide* does not seem to find a solution in multiple forms of agency. In the film, all movement toward agency is thwarted by premodern law (the *kuroko* and the scripted). But *Double Suicide* is not without its own filmic triumphs. Because something does suggest the possibility of an escape from the bonds of the (premodern) law – in the two scenes depicting sexual relations between Koharu and Jihei. Not only does the classical script disappear, but, as I noted previously, there is a tacit conflict between the formal spectacle of Koharu and the refusal of phallocentrism. Here the *kuroko* either disappear or merely watch. They do not manipulate the movements of props around the actors, nor the actors themselves. In the first of the two scenes, as Jihei embraces Koharu she intones, "I want to die with you." The second takes place in a cemetery. It seems as though desire here is coded as precisely that which leads to something extra-Symbolic (a surplus beyond the discursive). That is, the representation of desire within the Symbolic nonetheless reveals something more. Something bound to death and to a subject-shattering pleasure. Something that is not always already scripted, mediated by the orthographic, and linked to the premodern non-subject? And yet, something that might make conscious the lack inherent in the suturing of subjectivity. Can the lovemaking scenes – the modern addendum to the classical script (that, to reiterate, are nowhere in the playscript), particularly the final one that interrupts the *michiyuki* – be read as the (impossible) attempt to grasp at some representation of the Real, or that which is "behind" the gaze or absent from it? Something that radically undoes the subject and frees it from a gendered cultural tautology and particularism? (There is, I think, nothing intrinsically indexical of Japan in the love scenes.)

Ironically then, the aesthetic of disinterestedness and the radical alterity of the Lacanian gaze (and not the conventional so-called male one) provide the means both to a politicized poetics and an aestheticized scopic economy in *Double Suicide*. By theatrically citing the exteriorized subjectivity and ideal of *iki* that informed Edo puppet theater, in modern filmic time-space *Double Suicide* suggests a way out of the impossible dilemma and at least, makes a gesture toward the Real.

Finally, the film might also be described as a depiction of the Lacanian ethical act and Koharu in particular likened to Antigone. The original play, but even more so the film, could certainly be called a lament over "the law," as Koharu (and Jihei) stand on the brink of death – or what Lacan called "between two deaths," or "the second death." Like Antigone, they *choose* death not because death is a sublime experience, but because they have no other choice if they follow the desire that inhabits them.

> Antigone chooses to be purely and simply the guardian of the being of the criminal as such. No doubt things could have been resolved if the

> social body had been willing to pardon, to forget and cover over everything with the same funeral rites. It is because the community refuses this that Antigone is required to sacrifice her own being in order to maintain that essential being which is the family *Atè*, and that is the theme or true axis on which the whole tragedy turns.[43]

Throughout, again like Antigone, Koharu and Jihei express the metonomy of desire, articulating what they can never have because it is not possible by law. As they embark upon their final journey over the bridges toward death, the narrator speaks for them in the play,

> Poor creatures, though they would discover today their destiny in the Sutra of Cause and Effect, tomorrow the gossip of the world will scatter like blossoms the scandal of Kamiya Jihei's love suicide, and, carved in cherry wood, his story to the last detail will be printed in illustrated sheets.
>
> Jihei, led on by the spirit of death – if such there be among the gods – is resigned to this punishment for neglect of his trade. But at times – who could blame him? – his heart is drawn to those he has left behind, and it is hard to keep walking on. Even in the full moon's light, this fifteenth night of the tenth moon, he cannot see his way ahead – a sign perhaps of the darkness in his heart? The frost now falling will melt by dawn but, even more quickly than this symbol of human frailty, the lovers will melt away.[44]

Clinging to each other, the lovers alternate between professions of love and laments over their imminent deaths. They approach the point of "madness" that has the potential to propel the subject beyond the law.

> From Antigone's point of view life can only be approached, can only be lived or thought about, from the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side. But from that place she can see it and live it in the form of something already lost.
>
> And it is from the same place that the image of Antigone appears before us as something that causes the Chorus to lose its head, as it tells us itself, makes the just appear unjust, and makes the Chorus transgress all limits, including casting aside any respect it might have for the edicts of the city.[45]

When Lacan writes that Antigone "immortalizes the family *Até*,"

> "Immortalize" does not here mean to preserve in memory, but to continue not to forget that vitalizing fracture that permits one to "go mad," to dissolve oneself in a transforming act. One must not confuse the fact that Antigone is unyielding in carrying out her deed with a

> rigidity of being. If she is able to undertake such a fundamental break with the existing laws of her community, this is only because she has first been able to unloose herself from the fundamental law of her own being. It is not only the object of the drive that is split from itself; the subject, too, is fractured through the drives' repetitions.[46]

There is an important "twist" that must be addressed here, which I believe is what permits the film to move beyond the limitations of its (heterosexist and patriarchal) law, as well as to suggest an ethical act that transgresses both the law and subjective fixity. Like Antigone, Koharu is absolutely beautiful as she approaches her death, but the final death scene is not aestheticized. As real (biological) death becomes imminent, Koharu moans, "I don't want to die!" As death drive gives way to death, that is, loses its sublimated aspect, beauty gives way to horror. Jihei's first blows with the sword do not kill Koharu immediately. When he finally succeeds by stabbing her through the throat, the close-up of her face shows it frozen in terror, pain, and misery. This is what the beauty of Koharu has up until then shielded us from – the ugliness of death, unsublimated.

Most importantly for my point here, in both the film and the play, although they have sworn to die "together," Jihei ultimately hangs himself at some distance from Koharu's body. He does so in spite of his exhortations to Koharu in the film that they should die together. But she insists upon this separation in death site and time, *because of her obligation to his wife, Osan*. Hence, their double suicide ends up a death-in-singularity for both Koharu and Jihei.[47] This could be described as a double suicide that transgresses the law of double suicide in two ways: they die apart and Koharu's final commitment is not to Jihei, but to Osan. It is the *empathy* of woman to woman that, in the end, Koharu must obey above all else. She does not capitulate to the genre of double suicide (in which the lovers die side by side), nor to the law of class society that deems their attachment illegal for economic reasons, nor behave in obedience to patriarchal law that insists that women and their relations are relegated to objects of exchange between men.

Moreover, Osan is equally ethical in this sense, in her willingness to go forward to a "mad excess" when she offers to hand over all her worldly goods and become "a nursemaid or a cook" in the household once Koharu is redeemed by Jihei.[48] Like Koharu, Osan decides to *act* in accordance with her emotional bond or out of *empathy* with the other woman, over and above her duty as wife to husband. De Bary draws our attention to Shinoda's characterization of Osan's behavior as "abnormal,"

> In the way she is driven into the corner, the wife Osan is the very embodiment of the despair of Chikamatsu's age. And the abnormality of the ideal human being she is made to represent is indissolubly linked to the depth of that despair. In my opinion, we cannot grasp Osan's

> actions simply as a manifestation of the forbearance, which is made into a virtue by the family system. For Osan's virtuous behavior is not compelled: on her own initiative she sacrifices herself for her husband's lover.[49]

My reading suggests that in this "abnormality" can be seen the pure, psychoanalytic ethical act. From this perspective, Osan and Koharu, each in her own way, transgress both social law and the laws of "genre" (of double suicide, of wifely duty). Rather than *act* only in relation to Jihei (and/or social law, and/or Osan's parents) as nodal point, both women choose instead to act in relation to the other woman. And that the two film roles are both played by the same woman also suggests an inherent lack of fixity in their being – or, in Lacanian terms, could be said to present women as "not-all." This, in turn, perhaps makes the movement towards something beyond the Symbolic possible. In contrast, then, to Jihei, who seems caught between transgression and capitulation to law, or lost in a conflict of his own and the Other's desire, it is the women who ultimately raise the ethical bar.[50] Reaching for something "beyond" the Symbolic, Koharu and Osan insist upon inhabiting the desire that is in them.

Notes

Introduction

1 The epigraph is as quoted by Audie Bock, *Japanese Film Directors*, 347.
2 *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, 1115.
3 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*; Iain Chambers, "The Wound and the Shadow," in *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*; Rey Chow, "The Fascist Longings in Our Midst," in *Ethics After Idealism*; Naoki Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*.
4 See Jacques Lacan's discussion of Antigone's beauty, which is a "blinding effect" obscuring her statement that she is dead and desires death in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VII*, 281.
5 Lacan, *Seminar Book*, *VII*. Secondary sources that discuss Lacanian ethics include: Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman*; Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*; Willy Apollon and Richard Feldstein, eds, *Lacan, Politics, Aesthetics*.
6 The concept of drive must be distinguished from instinct or need, such as hunger or thirst. Need is concerned with interior body organs. Need comes and goes and is satisfied when instinct is met. Drive is the psychic component of need. Unlike the waxing and waning of need, drive is constant, and cannot be satisfied. Drive is concerned with the areas on the surface of the body that connect to the interior organs that can be said to "house" need. Lacan identified four drives: oral, anal, scopic, and invocatory. Infants cannot satisfy their own needs. Hence, need leads to demand, a demand for needs to be satisfied, that must be somehow communicated. But as the infant's needs are met (or not met) the infant learns it must accommodate the demand of the (m)Other, which is also coded in speech/language. The drives are therefore "completely embedded in language," and drive must be considered in relation to desire. Drive has an aim – which is *jouissance* – but can be said to never achieve, but rather to circle around, its goal. Drive aims at this *jouissance* itself and not an object. It is the split in the drive that gives rise to desire and that produces *objet a*. How one relates to *objet a* indicates how one wants to be positioned in relation to the Other's desire. Subjects may arrange their enjoyment in fantasies around various objects, but "given however, that the subject casts the Other's desire in the role most exciting to the subject, that pleasure may turn to disgust and even to horror, there being no guarantee that what is most exciting to the subject is also most pleasurable. That excitement, whether correlated with a conscious feeling of pleasure or pain, is what the French call 'jouissance'" (Bruce Fink, "The Subject and the Other's Desire," in *Reading Seminars I and II*, 86–7).
7 Joan Copjec, *Read my Desire*, 14.
8 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*.
9 Lacan postulated three "orders" or modes of existence and being in the world (or relations structuring subjectivity). These are: (1) the Imaginary, linked to the ego

and its fantasies, including those of wholeness, completeness, and self-sameness; (2) the Symbolic, linked to the subject as constructed by interdiction and desire, language, and symbolization; and (3) the Real, or that which is constitutively unrepresentable in consciousness or language and that which causes desire.

10 Zupančič, 160.

11 Although we may seek *jouissance*, as already stated in note 6 above, we "circle around" rather than achieve it. All drives, for Lacan, are ultimately what he called, following Freud, death drives (Marie-Hélène Brousse, "The Drive (1)," in *Reading Seminar XI*, 113–14; Copjec, *Imagine*, 30, 34). By this he means that drive aims at a return to a (mythical) state of stasis (the lamella) pre-dating the emergence of the being as the lacking subject. "Drive is a psychic movement around an object (subsequently fallen away) that once surrounded our body and closed up our now open and empty erogenous orifices (such as the breast that filled our mouth or the sound that filled our ears). These fallen partial objects, however, were once themselves part of a totality that Lacan calls the lamella" (Marie Jaanus, "The *Démontage* of the Drive," in *Reading Seminar XI*, 130–1). The Lamella, which Lacan also calls the myth of immortal life, is the imagined totality of the subject before s/he became that subject. This is the stasis at which the death drive aims itself. This does not mean, argues Copjec, that we all yearn only to rush headlong into death, because "there is no single, complete drive, only partial drives, and thus *no realizable will to destruction*; and . . . [because of] the second paradox of the drives, which states that the drive inhibits, as part of its very activity, the achievement of its aim. Some inherent obstacle – the *object* of the drive – simultaneously *brakes* the drive and *breaks it up*, curbs it, thus preventing it from reaching its aim, and divides it into partial drives. Rather than pursuing the Nothing of annihilating dissatisfaction, the now partial drives content themselves with these small nothings, these objects that satisfy them. Lacan gives to them the name *objects a*; they are, as it were, simulacra of the lost (maternal) object, or as Freud and Lacan both refer to it, of *das Ding*. *Object a* is, however, the general term. Lacan designates several specific objects: *gaze, voice, breast, phallus*" (*Imagine*, 34, original emphasis). This also means that the death drive's very activity is inhibited, or *sublimated* – it "achieves its satisfaction by *not* achieving its aim" and this is why Copjec claims that sublimation is the "proper destiny of the drive" (*Imagine*, 30).

12 Zupančič, 100.

13 Mas'ud Zavarzadeh, *Seeing Films Politically*, 69.

14 Ibid., 53.

15 See, for example, Žižek, "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism: The Case of Alain Badiou," *South Atlantic Quarterly*.

16 On aesthetics as originally a concern with the sensate, see Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*.

17 See Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*.

18 Charles R. Cabell, "Maiden Dreams: Kawabata Yasunari's Beautiful Japanese Empire, 1930–1945," Ph.D. diss.; David Pollack, *Reading Against Culture*; J. Keith Vincent, "Writing Sexuality: Heteronormality, Homophobia and the Homosocial Subject in Modern Japan," Ph.D. diss. and Ōe Kenzaburō, as cited in Vincent, "Writing Sexuality."

19 Van C. Gessel, *Three Modern Novelists*; Okude Ken, *Kawabata Yasunari*; Dennis Washburn, *The Dilemma of the Modern in Japanese Fiction.*

20 Kuritsubo Yoshiki, "Abe Kōbō: 'Sabaku no shisō' – sono rinri to sekaisei ni tsuite," *Kokubungaku*; Motoyama Mutsuko, "The Literature and Politics of Abe Kōbō: Farewell to Communism in *Suna no Onna*," *Monumenta Nipponica*.

21 Noguchi Takehiko, *Mishima Yukio no sekai*; Roy Starrs, *Deadly Dialectics*; Margerita Yourcenar, *Mishima.*

22 Danielle Bergeron, "Violence in Works of Art, or Mishima, from the Pen to the Sword," in *After Lacan* and "Mishima: A Death Foretold," Parts 1, 2, *(a): The Journal of Culture and the Unconscious*; Jerry Piven, "Narcissistie Revenge and Suicide: The Case of Yukio Mishima, Part Two," *Psychoanalytic Review* and *The Madness and Perversion of Yukio Mishima*; Ronald N. Turco, "Mask and Steel: Mishima When Life Imitates Art," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis* and "Primal Scene Derivatives in the Work of Yukio Mishima: The Primal Scene Fantasy," *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*.

23 That Kawabata and Mishima's own writings, essays, and talks – such as Kawabata Yasunari's Nobel Prize Speech, *Utsukushii Nihon no watakushi*, and the ruminations on the classical text by Yamamoto Tsunetomo, samurai turned Buddhist, in Mishima Yukio's *The Way of the Samurai*, reproduce such a connection between their modern aesthetics and those of the premodern period does not in any way negate my point. This is a conventional manifestation of Orientalism, which as a hegemonic discourse requires the ideological complicity of the so-called East.

24 Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* and "Theories of German Fascism," in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2.

25 Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," in *Movies and Methods*.

26 Zupančič. Whereas the Other belongs to the Symbolic order, *objet a* belongs to the Imaginary order in Lacan's earlier writings, and later, defined as the "object-cause of desire," is linked to the order of the Real or that which lies beyond signification and symbolization. This *objet a* is both pieces of the self and of the m(Other) that are lost to the being in separation. This "living part of his being that contains *jouissance*" is to be (re)found in the subject's fantasy as, precisely, *objet a*. *Objet a* is an affect of a split, or cut, in the drive, rather than in the subject *per se*.

27 Copjec, *Imagin*e, 9.

28 According to Lacan, the infant is born into a world structured by discourse or a system of symbolic representations of reality. This linguistic structure, in fact, constructs the subject or the representation of the living being in consciousness. In order to take its place in language, the infant must, in a sense, give up something of its being – because, of course, there is always something of being that exceeds its representation. Lacan referred to this as a sort of "forced choice." Fink writes, "The child can be understood to in some sense choose to submit to language, to agree to express his or her needs through the distorting medium or straightjacket of language, and to allow him or herself to be represented by words" ("The Subject and the Other's Desire," 77). This can also be described as a "cutting off" of a part of being for the sake of existing, an act that highlights a lack or that piece of totality that is lost to any representation. This "piece" is also what Lacan and Freud called "*das Ding*" (the Thing) that is produced as the constitutive surplus to symbolization. Signification's inherent incompleteness splits symbolization from within the process itself. Lacan called the subject's submission to representation in language "alienation." Moreover, the movement into the Symbolic means that the representation of the subject by a signifier is always also veiled by other signifiers. Lacan also referred to the exchange of meaninglessness for meaning as "Symbolic" castration, by which the subject moves into the realm of "knowledge," accepting that a signifier stand in for the "self." This subject, however, must also be understood as in fact, "nothing," or, if anything, as a "wanting-to-be." It is a *construct* necessary for functioning in the Symbolic order.

29 Zupančič, 164–5.

30 The Real must not be confused with reality. Our perception of reality is always filtered through our individual psyches and the cultural discourses into which we

are born, hence reality is always structured by both the Symbolic and Imaginary orders. Antonio Quinet explains: "The real as a body of experience is excluded from reality. The imaginary gives shape and form to things we can perceive through our representations or signifiers. We know that reality, which is not the same for each person, is structured by the symbolic order. Whereas the real is not normally part of reality" ("The Gaze as an Object," in *Reading Seminar XI*, 145).

31 Alain Badiou's ethics, like Lacan's, is about being faithful to a subjective desire that requires repudiation of what Badiou calls the state of the situation (i.e., social norms), in performing an act that originates in an event that, in Lacan's words, throws the subject "out of joint" with the Symbolic (or the state of the situation). Unlike Lacan, it is not an encounter with the death drive (the Real), but the "being" in a situation which becomes the point of impossibility. See his *Ethics*.

32 Žižek, 258.

33 See Andrew Barshay, "Postwar Social and Political Thought," in *Modern Japanese Thought*; Victor Koschmann, *Revolution and Subjectivity in Postwar Japan*; Maruyama Masao, "The Ideology and Dynamics of Japanese Fascism," in *Thought and Behavior in Modern Japanese Politics*.

34 Ibid.

35 See, for example, Yamazaki Masao, *Mishima Yukio ni okeru danshoku to tennōsei*.

36 See Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions.*

37 See David Desser, *Eros Plus Massacre*; Satō Tadao, *Nihon eiga shi*, Vol. 3.

Part I: Women as second nature and other fascist proclivities in Kawabata Yasunari – Introduction

1 Part I is a greatly expanded and revised version of an article published as "Kawabata Yasunari ron: Homososhiaritii to daini no shizen no seiji" (On Kawabata Yasunari: The politics of homosociality and second nature) in *Bungaku*. I have also here and there included sentences or passages that originally appeared in "The Fictional Works of Kawabata Yasunari," in *Great Literature of the Eastern World*. In addition, I gave several talks at various stages of writing Part I. These were: "Kawabata Yasunari and Fascist Aesthetics," Modern Japan History Workshop Series (University of Rhode Island, Kingston, RI, February, 2003); "Virgins and Other Little Objects: Kawabata's Fascist Proclivities," Culture and Fascism in Inter-war Japan Symposium (University of California, Berkeley, March 2001); "Kawabata Yasunari ni okeru daini no shizen" (Second nature in Kawabata Yasunari) (Josai University, Chiba, Japan, June 1999); Keynote address. "Kawabata Yasunari ron: Homososhiaritii to daini no shizen no seiji" (On Kawabata Yasunari: The politics of homosociality and second nature) at the "Nihon kindai bungaku to jendā" (Modern Japanese literature and gender) symposium (Tokyo University, Tokyo, Japan, June, 1999). A round-table discussion that followed my keynote speech at Tokyo University was published as: "Nihon kindai bungaku to jendā" (Modern Japanese literature and gender), *Bungaku*, 123–39. I also note here that because most of the primary literary texts that I discuss throughout this study are available in English translation I have quoted from those translations except when I felt the need to provide my own version for one reason or another. Most commonly my translations are more literal, to show the connection between my argument and the text in its original phrasing. I note when I have tampered with the existing English translation. Most translations from other Japanese sources are mine, including those taken from the cinematic texts. However, because sometimes I also opted to use existing translations of non-literary texts I have clearly indicated this.

2 Makoto Ueda, "Kawabata Yasunari," in *Modern Japanese Writers*, 174–5.
3 Tachihara Masaaki, "Kawabata bungaku no erotishizumu," in *Kawabata Yasunari*, Vol. 13, 116.
4 Kawabata Yasunari, *Bi no sonzai to hakken* is actually two Japanese lectures gathered under a single title and followed by an English translation by V.H. Viglielmo. Lecture dates and locations are: University of Hawaii, May 1, and the Hilo Campus of the University of Hawaii, May 16, both in 1969.
5 When I use the term the "real," uncapitalized, I mean it to signify something like "material reality" as we apprehend it within culture and language. When I use the term the "Real," capitalized, I intend it to signify in the Lacanian sense – that is, as the realm surplus to and unrepresentable within the Symbolic order, or thought and consciousness.
6 As Michel Foucault put it, the author-function "does not develop spontaneously as the attribution of a discourse to an individual. It is, rather, the result of a complex operation which constructs a certain rational being that we call 'author.' Critics doubtless try to give this intelligible being a realistic status, by discerning, in the individual, a 'deep' motive, a 'creative' power, or a 'design,' the milieu in which writing originates. Nevertheless, these aspects of an individual which we designate as making him an author are only a projection, in more or less psychologizing terms, of the operations that we force texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits that we establish as pertinent, the continuities that we recognize, or the exclusions that we practice. All these operations vary according to periods and types of discourse" ("What is an Author," in *Textual Strategies*, 150).
7 Cabell.
8 I am referring, of course, to *Asakusa kurenaidan*, now available in translation with the title *The Scarlet Gang of Asakusa.*

1 Myth-making

1 See Ueda, "Kawabata Yasunari," 201–14; Washburn; Masao Miyoshi, "The Margins of Life," in *Accomplices of Silence*, 94–121; Kosai Shinji, "Kawabata Yasunari shō," in *Kawabata Yasunari: Nihon no bigaku*, Vol. 27.
2 Ueda, "Kawabata Yasunari," 206–8.
3 As quoted and translated by Donald Keene, "Kawabata Yasunari," in *Dawn to the West*, 807.
4 Almost any text dealing with the transition to modernity in Japan brings up this late Taisho – early Showa anxiety over excessive modernization and the trauma of the speed of transformation. One culminating moment was a symposium, "Kindai no chōkoku" ("Overcoming the modern") in 1942 of Japanese intellectuals and writers on the perceived problem of Westernization and modernization. For a good overview in English of the rejection of the West see Tetsuo Najita and Harry D. Harootunian, "Japan's Revolt Against the West," in Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, ed., *Modern Japanese Thought*. See also Kobayashi Hideo's unusual and unconventional anti-romantic writings in *Literature of the Lost Home*. See also Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, *In Praise of Shadows*.
5 For example, Miyoshi, "The Margins of Life," in *Accomplices of Silence*, 111.
6 Pollack, however, finds the structure of *nō* drama in *Snow Country*, 116.
7 If I remember correctly, it was Professor Paul Anderer who used this wonderful phrase "fetishization of the trivial" to describe *monogatari* when I was in graduate school.
8 Kawabata Yasunari, *Thousand Cranes*, 125. Hereafter pagination follows quotations parenthetically within text.

9 Edward Seidensticker, "Introduction" in Kawabata Yasunari, *Snow Country*, vii–viii.
10 Kawabata Yasunari, *Snow Country*, Kuwamoto Tadaaki, illustrator, Limited Editions.
11 See Thomas LaMarre, *Uncovering Heian Japan*, for a fascinating and pathbreaking analysis of the figural and other extra-linguistic attributes of Heian-period poetics.
12 See Harry D. Harootunian, "Epilogue," in *Things Seen and Unseen*, 407–39; Nina Cornyetz, *Dangerous Women, Deadly Words*, especially "Leaky Archetypes," 28–44.
13 Kosai, 59. In addition to *Snow Country*, *The Lake* and *House of the Sleeping Beauties* are narratives written by Kawabata. The other texts Kosai references are Heian-period poetry anthologies (*Kokinshū* and *Shinkokinshū*); *haikai* is here used as another term for *renga*, or linked poetry.
14 Kawabata Yasunari, "Shinshin sakka no shinkeikō kaisetsu," 172–83.
15 Kawabata Yasunari, *Utsukushii Nihon no watakushi*, translated section by Seidensticker, 49, 47. Although the Japanese text follows Japanese convention, by being paginated and reading from right to left, strangely, the English text that appears at the end of the Japanese reverses the Japanese order (and, as does conventional English, thus starts at the end of the book, reading left to right). Pagination, however, is continuous in the Japanese order. That is why the page numbers decrease (or appear backward) in multi-paginated citations to the English translation that hereafter appear parenthetically following quotations within text.
16 As quoted and translated by Ueda, "Kawabata Yasunari," 208.
17 I have written about this at length elsewhere, but to briefly summarize: landscapes described and painted in premodern texts were not attempts to represent "the real landscape." To borrow the critic Karatani's description, landscape was more accurately "a weave of language" given signification by poetry (Karatani Kōjin, "One Spirit, Two Nineteenth Centuries," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 619.) Natural landscape, as described in medieval travel diaries or drawings, was depicted following canonized antecedent texts and paintings. The medieval artist or diarist did not try to capture the essence of landscape as he or she actually observed it; rather, the requirements of a variety of rigid rhetorical forms dictated the description and appreciation of famous sites previously celebrated in the literary canon. According to this logic, there were strict customs delineating how to express the putative "true essence" of the object – including appropriate and inappropriate combinations of particular birds, trees and flowers, or such dictums as, for example: mountains in spring are best depicted with mist and clouds. Therefore the artist-diarist made sure to include mist in his spring mountain depictions regardless of whether mist was present at the moment of viewing the physical site. This is what Karatani has called a "transcendental" vision of space. In order for Meiji-period artists and writers to see an actual landscape as an appropriate subject of artistic production, "this transcendental vision of space had to be overturned" (Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 27). See also Cornyetz, "Tracing Origins," in *Dangerous Women*, 168–85.
18 Andrew Feenberg, "The Problem of Modernity in the Philosophy of Nishida," in *Rude Awakenings*, 155–6.
19 Makoto Ueda, "Yūgen and Erhabene: Ōnishi Yoshinori's Attempt to Synthesize Japanese and Western Aesthetics," in *Culture and Identity*, 284.
20 Ibid., 297–9.
21 Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time*, 161.
22 For English language critical commentary on these philosophers see, for example, Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, ed., *Modern Japanese Thought*; J. Thomas Rimer, ed., *Culture and Identity*; James W. Heisig and John C. Maraldo, eds, *Rude Awakenings*; Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*.

23 Robert Sharf, "Whose Zen? Zen Nationalism Revisited," in *Rude Awakenings*, 45.
24 Ibid., 44–6.
25 As was more evident in his earlier eulogy to Yokomitsu Riichi, "Sufferer of the New Asia that fought the West, Pioneer of the New Tragedy in the Asian Tradition, You shouldered such a destiny, And you left the world sending a smile to Heaven." As quoted and translated from the dedication page of Yuasa Yasuo, *Watsuji Tetsurō* in Najita and Harootunian, 272. I have added commas in place of the stanza format.
26 Although some argue that Ch'an deeply impacted Neo-Confucianism in China. See for example Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book*, 425–30.
27 Nishida Kitarō, *Ishiki no mondai*, in *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, Vol. 3: 3–236.
28 As translated and quoted by Augustín Jacinto Zavala, "The Return of the Past: Tradition and the Political Microcosm in the Later Nishida," in *Rude Awakenings*, 133, 144. Original: *Nishida Kitarō zenshū*, Vol. 12: 136, 337.

2 Fascist aesthetics

1 Mark Neocleous, *Fascism*, ix. Neocleous's excellent, sweeping analysis covers virtually all of European fascism, but completely excludes any reference to Japanese fascism. As I hope this study will clarify, his analysis can be mobilized to a critique of Japanese fascism as well.
2 Osborne, 160.
3 Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism.*
4 Neocleous, xi, xii.
5 Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff, "Introduction," in *Fascist Visions*, 9. Emphasis added.
6 Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 241, 242.
7 Andrew Hewitt, "Fascist Modernism," in *Fascism, Aesthetics and Culture*.
8 Ibid., 44–5.
9 For more on the question of fascism in relation to modernism, see Hewitt's book, *Fascist Modernism*; Osborne; Griffin.
10 Karatani Kōjin, "Uses of Aesthetics: After Orientalism," *Boundary 2*, 152–3.
11 Sontag, 42–3.
12 Chow, 17.
13 Griffin, 32.
14 Ibid., 33.
15 Neocleous, 72. Original emphasis.
16 I put national in quotations here because, of course, the past to which many reactionary modernists refer predates the formation of modern nation states.
17 Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism*, 188–93. At the heart of Nishida's Zen, there is a similar simultaneity of the non-simultaneous, in the "delusion" of a split between the so-called physical and biological worlds that obscures their simultaneous mutual negation of one another. In the biological realm time is both durative and progressive, it is the manifestation of the material world in its myriad forms, and includes the human-historical world. The physical realm, to the contrary, is spatial, in which time is reversible rather than teleological. This is a realm of simultaneity, in which the manifestation of the material individual is negated by the universal, or the One. See Nishida, *Last Writings*.
18 Osborne, 160–96.
19 As described by Osborne, ibid. See also Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism.*
20 Osborne, 164. Original emphasis.
21 Ibid., 167.

22 Hewitt, *Fascist Modernism*, 184, 185. Hewitt is referring to Lyotard's "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde."
23 Benjamin, "Theories of German Fascism," in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 2, 312–21.
24 Hewitt, *Political Inversions*, 249.
25 Najita and Harootunian, 207.
26 Tanizaki, 8, 39, 42. Emphasis added.
27 Peter Duus, "Nagai Ryūtarō and the 'White Peril,' 1905–1944," 42–3. Emphasis added.
28 See Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss," in *Writing History*, *Writing Trauma*, 43–85, for an enlightening discussion of the distinctions between, and confusions over, absence and loss.
29 Najita and Harootunian, 219.
30 Ibid. Emphasis added.
31 Maruyama, 43.
32 Neocleous, 75.
33 Ibid., 76.
34 I discuss Watsuji in greater detail in the section on Abe Kōbō. For a thorough and compelling discussion of Watsuji see Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, Chapters 3 and 4.
35 Kevin Doak, "Nationalism as Dialectics," in *Rude Awakenings*, 186.
36 Neocleous, 14–15.
37 Ibid., 77, 15.
38 Harry D. Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity*, 65–6, xxv, xxvi–ii.
39 See Hewitt, who has written about this extensively in his "Fascist Modernism," *Fascist Modernism* and *Political Inversions*.
40 Hewitt, *Political Inversions*, 7
41 Michel Foucault, "Preface," in Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, xiii.
42 Neocleous, x.
43 Nancy Locke, "Valentine de Saint-Point and the Fascist Construction of Woman," in Affron and Antliff, eds, *Fascist Visions*, 75. Klaus Theweleit is quoted from his *Male Fantasies*, Vol. 1, xv.

3 Kawabata and fascist aesthetics

1 See Christopher Ives, "Ethnical Pitfalls in Imperial Zen and Nishida Philosophy: Ichikawa Hakugen's Critique," in *Rude Awakenings*, 16–39. Ives has summarized charges made by Ichikawa Hakugen (according to Ives, the only Japanese Buddhist to critique the collusion of Zen with Japan's role in the Second World War): "Nishida's thought developed from this 'pure experience' of 'facts just as they are' and eventually arrived at consideration of the 'historical world.' Through this development he attempted to provide a logic and an ontological ground for the initial epistemology of 'pure experience' and thereby rid his standpoint of what he called 'psychologism.' In this process he formulated such notions as the 'logic of place' and at times he wrote in a Kegon Buddhist vein about the importance of 'See[ing] the universal principle in the particular thing' . . . with the universal and the particular existing in an 'absolutely contradictory self-identity.' . . . From Ichikawa's perspective, this standpoint presents problems when applied to the socio-political realm as Nishida did when he meshed it within the Japanese imperial system. First, 'in "fact-ism" (*jijitsu shūgi*) or "actuality-ism" (*genjitsu shūgi*) as the viewpoint of seeing the universal principle in the particular thing, one can discern the nondual structure of "ought" and "is" '. . . 'This is a matter of seeing the principle at the base of actuality, not of changing the

material structure of actuality' and with such contemplative passivity this approach generally accepts actuality and hence makes no distinction between 'is' and 'ought' and provides no impetus for social criticism or transformative activism" (24–5). Moreover, Ives writes that according to Ichikawa, Nishida's logics of *basho* (place) and *soku-hi* (logic of absolutely contradictory self-identity) "in and of themselves . . . provide no basis for critical evaluation of societies or for praxis aimed at transforming a society from what it 'is' to what it might or 'ought' to be . . . Nishida's standpoint offers little philosophical support for critical, autonomous responsibility" (26).

2 Jacinto Zavala, 143. The quotes from Nishida are from his *zenshū*, Vol. 12: 346, 409, 417.

3 Of course all history is narrative and as such there is no one, singular, "real" history separated from narrative perspective. Here I use the word history essentially in the Marxist sense, as does Neocleous, to signify class struggle and the violence of domination.

4 Neocleous, 79.

5 See Gessel, 133–94, for more in English on how Kawabata concretely acted in ways complicit with the war effort. See also Cabell.

6 Ben-Ami Shillony, *Politics and Culture in Wartime Japan*, 126–7.

7 Hatori Tetsuya, "Sensō jidai no Kawabata Yasunari," in *Kawabata Yasunari: Nihon no bigaku*, Vol. 27, 149.

8 Tsuji Kunio, "Kawabata Yasunari ron," in *Kawabata Yasunari: Nihon no bigaku*, Vol. 27, 46–52.

9 Kobayashi Yoshihito, "*Bokka* ron," in *Kyojitsu no himaku*, Vol. 5, 170.

10 Hatori Tetsuya, 150, 151.

11 Hatori Kazuei, "Shôwa jyūnendai bungaku to Kawabata," *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū*, 113.

12 Hirakawa Sukehiro, "Kawabata Yasunari ni okeru aestheticizing," in *Kawabata Yasunari: Nihon no bigaku*, Vol. 27, 105.

13 This is also evident in Kawabata's *Eirei no ibun*, a collection of letters from deceased soldiers at the front, to which Kawabata added his commentary. See Cabell for excerpts in English translation as well as commentary on this narrative.

14 Kobayashi Yoshihito.

15 I have paraphrased Neocleous's quote from Georges Sorel, one of the influential French theorists on national socialism whose writings influenced many fascists, on how to mobilize the masses to support a socialist movement. Here is the quote proper: "use must be made of a *body of images* which, by *intuition* alone, and before any considered analyses are made, is capable of evoking as an undivided whole the *mass of sentiments* which corresponds to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism" (Neocleous's emphasis, 8). Original: Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 130–1.

16 Tsuji, 51.

17 Ōe Kenzaburō, *Japan, the Ambiguous and Myself*, 116.

18 Ibid., 118.

19 As quoted and translated by Vincent, "Writing Sexuality," 153–4. Original: Ōe, "Sevuntiin," in *Seiteki ningen*, 315–16. Translated as Ōe, *Two Novels: Seventeen and J*. As Vincent explains, Ōe writes here that it is the "sexual" human being who merges with, rather than confronts the world, is fascist, and makes a negative binarism with the "political" human being. See Vincent's enlightening discussion.

20 In this invocation of Lévinas I follow Sharf who followed Jan Van Bragt in invocating Lévinas to discuss Kyoto School Buddhism. Original: Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 52. See Jan Van Bragt, "Kyoto Philosophy – Intrinsically Nationalistic?" in *Rude Awakenings*, 254 and Sharf, 51.

4 Virgins and other little objects

1 As quoted and translated in Lacan, *Four Fundamental*, 17. The original poem is "Contrechant," in Louis Aragon, *Le fou d'Elsa*, 73.

2 I am here using two terms, the look and the Gaze, to signify different things. I will use the term Gaze, capitalized, to refer to the Lacanian concept, and the terms the look, the gaze or the verbs to look and to gaze, uncapitalized, in their conventional senses. The Gaze, as Copjec has so clearly elucidated, is a radically different one from the panoptic gaze, or the so-called "male gaze," which assumes power on the side of the subject who gazes ("The Orthopsychic Subject," in *Read My Desire*, 15–38). The Lacanian Gaze is neither omniscient nor empowered on the side of the subject. It does not replicate the conventional film theorists' gazer's fantasy by which the subject sees not only itself reflected, but a reflection of itself as the master of everything it sees. Instead, it shatters the illusion of a unified subject. Lacan's complex theory of the Gaze has its foundation in, but radicalizes, Jean-Paul Sartre's ontological analysis of being. This is because, first, like Sartre, Lacan postulates the Gaze to be on the side, so to speak, of the Other. Sartre illustrates the function of what is translated as "the look" with two anecdotes – of a walker in a park and of a peeper at a peephole, who are suddenly aware of the potential look of the other (who is also the Other) by a rustling of bushes or a sound in the hallway. In this moment, the looking subject's perspectival world shifts, from an imaginary one laid out temporally and spatially with the looking subject at the central vantage point, to one in which the gazer becomes the object of the possibility of the look and is objectified within the Other's perspective. In fact, with the look, the world does not merely shift, it "disintegrates" (Sartre, "The Look," in *Being and Nothingness*, 340–3) Similarly, for Lacan, the Gaze annihilates the illusion of a world constructed according to a particular perspective. Unlike Sartre, for Lacan, it is not that the surprise of becoming aware of the potentially gazing other objectifies, and thereby shames the gazing subject-turned-object, but rather that the surprise is about "the subject sustaining himself in a function of desire" (*Four Fundamental*, 85). Out of this emerges the subject as a *desiring effect* of the law (social interdiction, prohibition, and other mores) and not a realization of the law. The Lacanian model postulates an alterity in self-recognition (rather than consolidation and affirmation), and characterizes desire as always split between itself and its repression. It dismantles Cartesian perspectivalism in part, because to borrow Copjec's explanation, "the subject . . . cannot be located or locate itself at the point of the gaze, since this point marks . . . its very annihilation" (*Read my Desire*, 35). Further, the Gaze and the look are not the same (although the French word, *le regard* is the same, the functions of the looking subject, the looked-at-subject, and the Gaze are different). The Gaze cannot be attributed to a looker. Using two diagrams of two triangles and then a third one in which the two are superimposed one over the other in opposing directions (*Four Fundamental*, 91, 106), Lacan illustrates the overlapping of the look on the part of the gazer and the Gaze that disintegrates the look. The first triangle, on the left, illustrates the imagined relation of the painter of a painting (or representation of an object) that posits the "geometral point" as the position of the looker, or the subject as viewing-subject, gazing at an object through the framing of its representing image. This look is linked to a "perspective point" (in the first triangle) that putatively locates the looking subject at a vantage point from which s/he ostensibly transparently represents the object in an image. The second triangle flips the perspective, in which a point of light, which is the position of the Gaze, positions the viewing subject as a picture, apprehended through the mediation of a screen. This point of light or Gaze views the "subject" turned object, or turned

into a "picture" through the medium of an opaque screen that determines how the picture (the subject) is apprehended. This triangle thus illustrates the subject given-to-be-seen by the Gaze. Finally, Lacan superimposes the two triangles so that both left and right sides are now simultaneously points of observation and planes of the observed, labeling the left side "the Gaze" and the right side "the subject of representation," with "image" and "screen" filtering apprehension in the middle. "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (*Four Fundamental*, 72). Importantly, the screen does more than mediate, it in effect also *shields* us from the Gaze (the Real). We are both illuminated in the light on the screen (that is, we come into being through it) and shielded by it. In any representation, Lacan holds, the subject appears in the form of the screen or what he also calls a stain or spot within the configuration of the Gaze. For more see Copjec, *Imagine*, 208–31, on Sartre's ontology and Lacanian psychoanalysis; Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, 49–81, on the gaze in relation to women; and although Copjec has taken issue with sections of her reading of Lacan, Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, especially 125–56.

3 There have, of course, been treatments of how Kawabata writes women from other perspectives, sometimes feminist in tone. Saegusa Kazuko's "Kawabata no gōman" is representative of one type of Japanese feminist critique that has been leveled at Kawabata. She criticizes the "arrogance" of Kawabata's portrayals of love stories, claiming that the dialectic of the relationships between men and women is little more than those between masters and slaves. See also Noriko Mizuta Lippet, "Kawabata's Dilettante Heroes," in *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature*, 120–45; Gwenn Boardman Petersen, "Kawabata Yasunari," in *The Moon in the Water*, 121–200; Victoria Vernon, "Creating Koharu: The Image of Women in the Works of Kawabata Yasunari and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō," in *Daughters of the Moon.* Vernon offers valuable insights into the construction of women in Kawabata's work, comparing his depictions with typical characterizations of the canon, as well as with renditions by his contemporaries.

4 In psychoanalytic discourse, the "abject" relates to a distinction first made between the developing subject and the not-self (pre-object objects); it differs from the "other" because the subject does not yet exist. Paradigmatically, the objects of expulsion, such as excrement and the amorphous state of not-being-self or the homeostasis that is the aim of the death drive are the substance of the abject. See Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror.*

5 For simplicity, and in keeping with the English translations of Kawabata's narratives, I have eliminated macrons in characters' names throughout Part II.

6 Miyoshi, "The Margins of Life," in *Accomplices of Silence*, 94–121.

7 On Kawabata's use of translucence and reflections as mediating forces, see, for example, Matthew Mizenko, "Kawabata bungaku ni okeru 'kagami,'" in *Kawabata Yasunari*, Vol. 13.

8 Okude, 118–46.

9 Matsuura Hisaki, "Miru koto no heisoku," *Shinchō*, 270.

10 Chow, 26.

11 I have revised Seidensticker's translation, "motion pictures superimposed one on the other" (15) here to a more literal rendering of "*eiga no nijyû utsushi*" from *Yukiguni*, 33.

12 The Lacanian subject must be distinguished from the "ego," or the unified, ideal self of the Imaginary order, that arises from what Lacan called the Mirror Stage. Here the infant consolidates the fragments of its selfhood into an imaginary unity, as it (mis)recognizes its mirror image as itself, identifies with that mirror image, and further, projects an idealized self-image onto the mirror image. The (Imaginary) ego function *enables* the individual to function as the Symbolic

construct, "I" in thought and language. Whereas the subject is changeable in relation to the shifting significations of an always imprecise and partial representation of the Real in language, the ego is fixed, imagined to be stable and unchanging. The Mirror Stage must also be understood as not only, nor primarily, a developmental stage in infancy, but as a structural constant.

13 Lacan, *Four Fundamental*, 73.

14 Ibid., 104. *Objet a*, as the source-object of desire, is a remainder of the Real around which desire circulates. In the visual or scopic field, then, the drive aims itself at the Gaze (of the Other), hence, the Gaze itself (not only the eye) can also be referred to as the *objet a* of the scopic drive, that scrap of the Real, which also covers up the void of the Real, promising both *jouissance* and potentially evoking anxiety. The *objet a*, however, of course, is not only relevant to the scopic drive, but is the source of desire for all the drives. Drive is always partial. Drive seeks the lost fragments of our (imagined complete) body (that which has been separated away, such as feces, urine, the breast, the afterbirth). *Petits objets a* are the psychic representations of those lost objects, that we seek to refind to reconstruct an imaginary unity that has been lost with initial castration, the primary cut. But *objet a*, in its relation to the Real, is not always, nor only, the harbinger of wholeness and well-being. "Physical castration, which occurs within the body of drive, is as necessary as castration by language. This 'primal separation' effects something real, a death, which has to occur, in order that something exist outside the structure so that the symbolization of substances becomes possible. It is a trauma not of meaning and meaninglessness as language is, but a trauma of being and non-being, ultimately of immortality and mortality, and hence proximate to the greatest possible states of anxiety and bliss. Reality is structured on the rejected object *a*, the something (a piece of our own being) relegated to non-being. That loss (in separation) produces simultaneously the object *a* (the real) and reality. The psychic subject, once a real other, can no longer be seen or heard. Invisible and inaudible, it nonetheless gazes at us or speaks inside us from the outside, arousing anxiety. It is the archaic object, annihilating or enticing us from the outside of our being with imminent non-being or the promise of fulfillment" (Jaanus, 125). See also previous note 12 as well as notes 6 and 26 of the introduction.

15 See Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, for a clear and concise explication of the woman in Lacan.

16 Ibid., 74.

17 Here I revise the last line of the quote from Seidensticker's translation, which replaces "*hana ni tsukete nioi o kaide mitari shite ita*" (he brought [the hand] to his nose and tried smelling it) from Kawabata Yasunari, *Yukiguni*, 32, with the edited "he brought the hand to his face" (Kawabata, *Snow Country*, 6–7). I discuss this deletion in more detail below. Apparently, in some early versions, this line was also edited by Japanese censors who found it too overtly sexual.

18 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction.*

19 Ibid., 488–9.

20 Eagleton, 16.

21 Mishima Yukio, "Eien no tabibito: Kawabata Yasunari no hito to sakuhin," in *Kawabata Yasunari*, Vol. 13, 30.

22 As Karatani describes it, "Kuki seeks to give a philosophic meaning to *iki* by means of a structural analysis of the different life-styles that developed in and around the pleasure quarters" ("One Spirit, Two Nineteenth Centuries," 621).

23 Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*, 204. Emphasis added.

24 As quoted and translated by Pincus, 202. Original from Kuki, 72–3. See Pincus for a highly instructive and insightful extended discussion of the importance of the "vulgar senses" to Kuki's notion of sensate experience.

25 Pincus, 15–16.
26 Mishima, "Eien no tabibito," 31.
27 Kawabata Yasunari, *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, 18, 19. Further pagination follows quotations parenthetically within text.
28 Mishima Yukio, "Introduction," in Kawabata, *House of the Sleeping Beauties*, 8.
29 See Jacques Lacan, "Subversion of the Subject," in *Écrits*, 292–325.
30 See Mishima, "Eien no tabibito"; Kobayashi Hideo, Review of *Snow Country*.
31 Matsuura, 270.
32 Itō Sei, "Kawabata no geijutsu," in *Kawabata Yasunari*, Vol. 14, 14.
33 Ibid., 18.
34 Zupančič, 90.
35 Ibid., 91.
36 Lacan, *Seminar Book VII*, 316.
37 Copjec, *Imagine*, 229.
38 Lacan, *Seminar Book VII*, 199.
39 Copjec, *Imagine*, 45–6.
40 The superego is, after all, the social and familial mores of a culture that have been internalized as the voice of conscience of the subject. See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, on the relation of the superego to culture and to the death drive.
41 Tachihara, 110.
42 I don't think, as Mizuta Noriko (Lippet) reads, because he has somehow killed her. See Lippet, 141, 144.
43 Kawabata, *Yukiguni*, 81.
44 Mizenko, 161.
45 On this aspect of how women are represented, see Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which is Not One*; Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*; Cornyetz, *Dangerous Women*.

Part II: The politics of climate and community in *Women in the Dunes* and "The idea of the desert" – Introduction

1 "Everyman" is Pollack's term that I borrow here. See Pollack, 125.
2 Thanks to Brett de Bary for drawing my attention to the elision of the politics of existentialism in discussions of the book and film. It is important to remember that Jean-Paul Sartre was deeply concerned with politics.
3 Desser, 77, 78 (no macrons in original; additions in brackets mine). Desser, like so many other commentators, makes virtually no distinction between the film and the book.
4 Exceptions from this universalist critical tendency include Pollack's discussion of the book and several entries in the 1997 *Kokubungaku* special issue on Abe. Numano Mitsuyoshi's "Sekai no naka no Abe Kōbō," begins by accusing non-Japanese readers of misunderstanding Abe when they assume his fictional portrayals are realistic of Japanese society. He also criticizes Japanese readers who proclaim Abe to be "international" and "a person without citizenship (*mukokuseikinin*), arguing that Abe must be rethought in the context of Orientalism. From this perspective, Numano brings up the familiar argument that universalism is, after all, a particularism of Western Continental-European-American ideology imposed by Western global domination. After this faultless beginning, Numano resorts to following Abe's own apparent lead, dubbing him a "Creole" writer and reasserting his status as a person without citizenship, but modified by the notion of linguistic and ideological pluralism. Kobayashi Masaaki's "Monogatariron kara *Suna no onna* o kaibō suru," contorts itself (and Abe's writings) in

an attempt to place Abe in a strictly Japanese literary genealogy. Although his instinct to go against the dominant severing of Abe from "Japan" is admirable, I had serious reservations about his argument. Kobayashi goes so far as to find assonance between Abe's portrayals of women and those of Izumi Kyōka! Koizumi Kōichirō's "*Suna no onna* sairon: kenkyūshi no ichigū kara" is the most historicist, and convincing, of this trajectory, although my interpretation is practically the obverse of his.

5 The communist party, in general, strategically allied with the occupation forces as "liberators," some with more real enthusiasm and expectation for democratic reform, others with the more savvy perspective of a strategy, aware that otherwise they could become targets of censorship. See Koschmann.

6 Koizumi, 22. Koizumi is, it must be stressed, discussing the book and not the film, and like Pollack interprets the metaphor of sand positively. In the film at least, as I will argue, this sense of the positive is eroded.

7 See, for example, Motoyama.

8 Keiko McDonald, *Cinema East*, 45.

9 Kanesaka Kenji, "Eiga sakka to Nihon dasshutsu," *Eiga geijutsu*, 68.

10 Okuno Takeo, "*Suna no onna* wa nani o eigaita ka," *Eiga geijutsu*, 64.

11 It is important to distinguish between my act of "ignoring" the book, and the ignoring I will accuse Kuritsubo Yoshiki of below.

12 Okuno, 64.

13 See Desser for a discussion of this "new wave" of Japanese filmmakers.

14 Satō Tadao, Vol. 3, 72, 89; Vol. 4, 36.

5 A Preface to *Woman in the Dunes*: space, geopolitics, and "The idea of the desert"

1 Abe Kōbō, "Sabaku no shisō"; Kuritsubo. Pagination to Abe's essay will follow quotes parenthetically in text.

2 Feenberg, 162.

3 The first character of the compound, *fū*, when pronounced as *kaze* or in certain other compounds, means wind or air. Pronounced *fū* in isolation or in compounds it may also designate style, custom, or mores. The second character, *do*, usually pronounced *tsuchi* in isolation, means earth or ground. The compound of the two, *fūdo*, thus references the naturalized notion of culture and/or spiritual essence, bound to the features of the geophysical environment.

4 *Fūdo* begins as Watsuji relates his sense of discord upon returning from a trip abroad, to encounter afresh the ever-increasing industrialization of the Japanese landscape. Trains and cars, he writes, have transformed Japanese cities and villages, but this transformation brings with it a feeling of spatial discord. That is, these items of industrialization don't look right; they are too big, somehow, they make an awkward match with the cluster of low, small homes and shops that they so rudely obscure. The text continues with a general discussion of the manner in which human existence is regulated by climactic factors, and then, in part two, with a postulation of three locational spheres in the world: monsoon, desert, and pasture climates, attributing generalized character traits to the different climates. In the third section Watsuji breaks down the monsoon category into two sub-sets of China and Japan, in order to separate Japan out as a unique climate that combines monsoon and non-monsoon attributes. This special climate is the reason for Japan's uniqueness and cultural superiority. *Fūdo* concludes with a section exploring antecedent climatology studies by Western philosophers such as Hegel and Herder, among others, which apparently is omitted in the English translation. See Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 150–1.

5 See Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 72–152, for an insightful and in-depth discussion of Watsuji and relation to the Other.
6 Ibid., 129.
7 Kuritsubo, 109–10.
8 Written and directed by André Cayatte; Christian Matras, cinematographer.
9 Kuritsubo, 109. He is referring to two interviews apparently published in 1984 and 1985 in *Subaru*.
10 Kuritsubo, 110–11.
11 Abe muses that the faults of the film may be linked to the (French) interpretation of the Armenian-authored original text by Vahé Katcha; the director and writer of the (adapted) screenplay was French (i.e., a colonizer).
12 See Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, for an analysis of the murderous relation between colonized Algerians and French doctors.
13 Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 44. Original emphasis. The sentence in quotations is from Frantz Fanon, "Concerning Violence," in *The Wretched of the Earth*, 30.
14 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 50. Original emphasis.
15 Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema*, 86. Original emphasis.
16 Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 119, paraphrasing Homi Bhabha from "Postcolonial Authority and Postcolonial Guilt." See also Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 123–4 on "time-lag." Bhabha builds on Lacan to define "time-lag" as "the temporal break in representation," through which "emerges the process of agency both as a historical development and as the narrative agency of historical discourse . . . the agent's intentionality, which seems 'manifestly directed' toward the truth of the order of symbols in the social imaginary, is also an effect of the rediscovery of the world of truth denied subjectivity (because it is intersubjective) at the level of the sign. It is in the contingent tension that results, that sign and symbol overlap and are indeterminately articulated through the 'temporal break'. Where the sign deprived of the subject – intersubjectivity – returns as subjectivity directed towards the rediscovery of truth, than a (re)ordering of symbols becomes possible in the sphere of the social. When the sign ceases the synchronous flow of the symbol, it also seizes the power to elaborate – through the time-lag – new and hybrid agencies and articulations" (*The Location of Culture*, 191–2).
17 Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 124, 125.
18 Although Sakai does not use the word fascist here, he argues that a repression of uncertainty in Watsuji's notion of the relationality of subjective position is tantamount to a refusal of the Otherness of the Other, and a disavowal of uncertainty in relation to the other, that I have throughout this study linked to fascist aesthetics. See *Translation and Subjectivity*, 75–152.
19 Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 119, 124. Sakai explains further that he is using Bergson's notion of *durée* (duration) here. See 123.
20 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 237.
21 The Mitsui Miike struggle was a battle between the corporation, Mitsui, and unionized coal miners in Miike, Kyūshu, over massive firings. A long strike begun in January 1960 ended with government mediation, but the workers were never rehired. The anti-Anpo movement refers to the 1960 protest against the renewal of the Japan-US Security Treaty (Anpo).
22 And thus, in place of the radical emptiness of the premodern Zen model, it is an empty subject, but one that is filled in, as it were, and with, community and affected by environment, or a system in which self and Other fulfill in each other and in nature as well as in "second" nature, or human society and culture.
23 Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*, 147, 148.
24 Watsuji Tetsurō, *Fūdo*, 52.
25 Badiou, 74.

6 Social networks and the subject

1 An important exception is Pollack's interpretation of Abe's book in his *Reading Against Culture*. My interpretation will differ from Pollack's, however, in its focus on notions of environment (*fūdo*), in the ethical evaluation of the subject (not just the "individual" versus the "community"), in my assessment of the conclusion, and by attempting a much more comprehensive discussion of contemporaneous ideology in a reading of the film version, rather than prose narrative of *Woman in the Dunes*.
2 McDonald, 45.
3 Satō Shigeomi, "Nihonteki shinmetorii kara no dasshutsu: *Suna no onna* ni itaru zōkei rinen o megutte," *Eiga Hyōron*; Kanesaka. In spite of the film's international success, because it was produced independently from the major studios, it received surprisingly limited critical attention in the major film journals at the time of release.
4 Ogura Masami, "*Suna no onna*," *Kinema junpō*, 86.
5 In the video version the film begins with the title sequence (both the English subtitled and non-subtitled Japanese commercial versions). In the film version some footage – of Niki at the bus station, disembarking the bus, and walking down the path toward the beach – precedes the title sequence.
6 Sartre, "The Look," in *Being and Nothingness*, 340–400. See my discussion of Sartre's look in relation to the Lacanian Gaze in "Virgins and other little objects."
7 Barshay, 289.
8 Ibid., 290. In the postwar most leftist writers felt that the "subordination of art to politics was damaging to culture" (Barshay, 290). This was likely in opposition to the prewar discourses on aesthetics and ontology that sought the universal in the particular (as detailed in the previous chapters on Kawabata) and the notion of aesthetical-being as essentially individually empty, but filled by community, and that was now perceived as one of the negative ideological factors leading to the disaster of Japanese imperialism and eventual defeat in the Second World War, as well as against the wartime subjugation of art to political agendas. The subordination of art to politics was also seen as *politically* counterproductive because it encouraged "inauthenticity" in literature. This construct, of seeing literature as imbued with the lofty mission of transmitting some (imaginary) authentic self, actually predates the war and has its roots in the *shishōsetsu*, or personal, confessional narrative. See Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession* and Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self* for more on the *shishōsetsu*. Thus, although the communist journal *Shin Nihon bungaku*, for example, called for politically responsible social realism to be produced by petty bourgeois writers only if they intermingled meaningfully with "the people," *Kindai bungaku*, a rival journal formed by a slightly younger generation of writers, advocated a type of personal confessionals by writers written from their perspectives as intellectuals. See Koschmann, especially "Literature and the Bourgeois Subject," in *Revolution and Subjectivity*, 41–97. As one of the *Kindai bungaku*-aligned writers Ara Masato wrote: "If, as writers, we are to pursue the emperor's war responsibility in a literary way, we will have to struggle with the semi-feudal sensibilities, emotions, and desires that are rooted in our own internal 'emperor systems.' That is the only way we can negate the emperor system *per se*, and the only way that is conducive to the formation of a modern person . . . We were unable to oppose the war . . . Why . . . ? Because we did not have a modern ego" (As quoted and translated by Koschmann, 65). To quote Ara again: "As petty bourgeois intelligentsia, we [can only] portray ourselves. To thoroughly investigate oneself, not as an observer, but with attention to various elements of one's inner self – this should be the starting point of literature from this moment forward, and ultimately it is this endeavor which

will connect us in a literary sense with the people" (As quoted and translated by Koschmann, 53). Writers, it was broadly believed, needed to discover strong identities or egos in order to write convincing and authentic works, and thus the individual rather than class became a major issue for these leftist writers (Barshay, 290), again, undoubtedly in reaction to prewar and wartime anti-individualist ideology. By the early to mid-1950s, battles over social realism and interiority once centered in various affiliated journals were no longer clearly identified with one journal or another.

9 Barshay, 286.

10 Tani Shinsuke, ed. "Abe Kōbō nenpyō," in *Ishikawa Jun, Jakeda Taijun, Mishima Yukio*, *Abe Kōbō*, Vol. 15.

11 Motoyama, 306.

12 This title is literally nonsense, and therefore I do not attempt a translation.

13 Thanks to Nagahara Yutaka for suggesting this line of thought.

14 Zupančič, 235.

15 Satō Shigeomi, 37.

16 McDonald, 40, 41–2.

17 Pollack, 129.

18 My source for this and further descriptions of capital is Karl Marx, *Capital*; for these passages, especially, "The Commodity," 125–77. The kidnapping could be likened to colonialization as well. Thanks to Sarah Frederick for the insight linking Niki's slave labor and colonial politics.

19 See Ibid., especially, "Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production," 949–1084.

20 Pollack, 128–9.

21 See, for example, Koschmann, Barshay, Maruyama.

22 In the early postwar, most Marxist intellectuals from both factions advocated compliance with the American occupation. Many saw the occupation forces as a sort of "liberation army" that would permit the completion of the bourgeois revolution and the development of a democratic society, only after which would a communist revolution be possible. The (temporary) enforcement of democracy by the Americans anticipated by Japanese intellectuals was welcomed. Increasingly, even the eventual communist revolution was conceived as a peaceful and non-confrontational future transformation. See Koschmann.

23 Barshay, 299–300. Standing aloof from direct affiliation with any particular camp was Maruyama Masao, probably the most influential intellectual of the immediate postwar, who according to Barshay, "worked from assumptions concerning the state and the individual that were drawn . . . from a combination of Kantian moralism and 'left-Hegelian' historicism . . . [in] the early postwar period, moreover, it was a popularized version of that [Maruyama's notion of] culture . . . that entered school textbooks" (Barshay, 280–1). See also Koschmann, Maruyama.

24 Barshay, 312, 315. The concept of *minzoku* as ethnic community had been used much as the German *Volk* in prewar and wartime propaganda, that is, as a way of homogenizing the Japanese through ethnicity and eliding the class differences between Japanese. See Neocleous for how the concept of *Volk* functioned in Nazi Germany.

25 See Barshay, Koschmann, Maruyama.

26 Motoyama, 320.

27 See Koschmann, especially "Philosophy and the Lacuna in Marxism," in *Revolution and Subjectivity*, 88–148, and Barshay.

28 Barshay, 315.

29 Kanesaka, 69.

30 Relentlessly the overwhelmingly urban population of Japan is inundated with representations of old modes of production such as the dipping of candles one by

one by (usually an old man or woman's) hand, the making of regional foodstuffs such as dried fish or *mochi* (sticky rice), the weaving or dying, and so forth, of varied textiles and handicrafts, all tediously labored by archaic production methods. These items are all, of course, for sale but the spectacle of their production and the labor of the producers are equally commodified. Surely the apex of this obsession with pre-technological production is the protected rice industry that still produces horribly malformed bodies side by side with exquisitely hand-nurtured rice grains. Today, this valorization spills beyond the borders of Japan proper, to seek out non-technologized production of goods around the world (connected with the travel industry, both domestic and international), to film and broadcast the hand-made handicrafts of places such as Tibet, for example.

31 Because the woman herself is eroticized, there is a degree of ambivalence brought to the otherwise clear critique of "doing things the conventional way." One could argue that the shots of the laboring couple are eroticized by virtue of proximity, in a sense, to the deeply erotic nature of the film overall. The portrayal of labor seems to have also been influenced in part by Shindō Kaneto's *Hadaka no shima* (*The Naked Island*, 1960), a film composed primarily of repeating, tedious shots of a family laboring. In *Hadaka no shima* however, one might argue that virtually *nothing* is eroticized.
32 See Marx, especially "The Working Day" in *Capital*, 340–416.
33 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 169. Original emphasis.
34 Irokawa Daikichi, *The Culture of the Meiji Period*.
35 See, for example, Makoto Oda, "Ethics of Peace," in *Authority and the Individual in Japan*.
36 Althusser, 170. Original emphasis.
37 Brecht, 98.
38 Pollack, 129.
39 Althusser, 168–9.
40 Okuno, 65.
41 See Marx, "Cooperation," in *Capital*, 439–54.
42 Pollack, 131.
43 Badiou, 74. Žižek, interestingly, finds Badiou's very notion of ethics to replicate the interpellation of the subject in the Althusserian sense. See his argument in "Psychoanalysis in Post-Marxism."
44 See the epilogue for elaboration on the distinction between Lacan's exemplar of Antigone as the embodiment of a psychoanalytic ethics and the Sadean "failure."

7 Technologies of gazing

1 A version of this chapter that also incorporates some passages from "Social Networks and the Subject," was first published as "Technologies of Gazing in *Women in the Dunes*." *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal, English Supplement*.
2 The epigraphs are from Okuno, 64 and Flitterman-Lewis, *To Desire Differently*, 2. The "textual disturbance" that Laura Mulvey highlighted in her political and psychoanalytic study of cinematic spectatorship, the 1975 "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism* refers, of course, to her claim that the figure of the woman in film signifies sexual difference. First, following both Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Mulvey argued that the figure of the female evokes a pleasurable, desirous looking and at the same time anxiety because she brings with her the threat of castration (essential for both men and women to take their place in the world of language and consciousness [the symbolic] as sexed subject). Second, building on contemporaneous film theory, although the female figure is an essential element of spectacle in narrative film, it simultaneously works against the progression of the narrative by freezing "the

flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (Mulvey, 809). Faced with this disturbance posed by the female figure in film, the male spectator, for whose active and masterful gaze the female figure is displayed, has two unconscious potential responses. He may sadistically demystify and devalue (or save) the woman or he may fetishize her to disavow her sexual difference (lack of a penis).

3 This sadistic resolution can be either thematic, in the sense of literally depicting the sexual or nonsexual domination of the woman within the diegesis or it can be structural in the sense of a resolution that dominates her. See Zavarzadeh.

4 Subsequent feminist film theorists have criticized Mulvey's work for its apparent essentialism. It permits neither a more complex analysis of identification by female or male spectators, such as, for example, a fluid, changing identification that is not necessarily sex-specific or a homoerotic gaze. In addition, it must be recognized that neither category "women" or "men" constitutes a monolithic unity, but both are heterogeneous by class, ethnicity or race, age, and so forth. For examples of historically important critiques see: Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," and "Woman's Stake: Filming the Female Body," Teresa DeLauretis, *Alice Doesn't*; Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*; Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* and *The Woman at the Keyhole*. Finally, Lacanian theorists such as Copjec have offered major challenges to the equation of the patriarchal gaze and the psychoanalytic one, charging that the psychoanalytic model does not, in fact, confer power and mastery. See Copjec, *Read My Desire* and *Imagine*.

5 Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape*, 323. Although the Japanese historical context is quite different from that of the United States, one can safely state that women's status was changing both legally and culturally through the 1950s and 1960s in Japan. For example, prostitution was outlawed in 1956, and women were returning to the work force in large numbers in the 1960s.

6 Mishima, "Eien no tabibito." See also Matsuura.

7 Okuno, 65.

8 Mulvey, 809.

9 See Haskell.

10 Satō Tadao, Vol. 4, 57–62.

11 See Desser for a non-gendered discussion of some of these films.

12 In an *Eiga geijutsu* interview with women directors of pink films in 1991, one of the women distinguishes between Japanese soft-core pornographic movies and those of the West because in Japan the woman is protesting as they have sex ("'*Dame*, *dame*' *nante iinagara yaru kedo*,") while in Western movies the woman is saying "Oh yes!" *Eiga geijutsu*, 113.

13 On response to Wakamatsu see for example, *Eiga geijutsu*, 17, a special issue on sadism in film, especially the several short essays grouped under the topic of "Wakamatsu Kōji, *Shojo geba geba*," 51–5.

14 An interesting exception – or way around censorship – that I found was a photograph of a realistic *painting* of a nude woman, with the (male) artist standing next to it in a 1959 issue of *Eiga geijutsu*.

15 Pubic hair and genitals were aggressively censored, even in pornographic films in modern Japan. It was only in the 1990s that so-called "hair nudes" (pictures of naked women revealing their pubic hair) were permitted, and today are easily found in mainstream magazines (not necessarily pornographic ones). Genitals continue to be taboo. See Allison, *Permitted and Prohibited Desires* for a discussion of censorship and its effect on pornographic comic books in Japan.

16 See, for example, scriptwriter Saji Kan, in "Waga nikutai eiga ron," 37; Fukuda Kazuhiko sounded much like Christian Metz turned neuropsychiatrist when he

noted the "neurological excitement of the eye" in the scopophilic act of film viewing, that made that viewing intrinsically erotic in nature ("Shinema erotishizumu no seiritsu," *Eiga geijutsu*, 37). This erotic film boom generated considerable debate. Some commentators lamented, others celebrated.

17 See, for example, any of the (many) *Eiga geijutsu* or *Kinema junpō* special issues in the mid-60s dedicated to chronicling and reproducing in stills the eroticism of these films.

18 Kimura Keigo, "Waga nikutai eiga ron," 36–7.

19 *Nikutai* means the flesh, or the body, and can connote either the sexual or physical body. *Nikutai kankei* means sexual relationship, but *nikutai rōdō* means physical or manual labor. The Japanese original has "our" (*waga*) that I have translated as "Japanese."

20 Women readers complained that the special issue reflected only men's viewpoints, and so in the subsequent issue the journal carried responses by women actors and writers (since there were virtually no women directors, I assume), who critiqued the original essays on Japanese film eroticism and added their own positions on "*nikutai eiga*" or flesh films. "Joryū geijutsuka ni yoru waga nikutai eiga ron oyobi hihan," *Eiga geijutsu*, 39–48.

21 Imamura's groundbreaking social-realist, gritty sex and violence, disenfranchised youth dramas were the biggest news in Japanese film production. His 1963 *Nippon konchūki* and Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes* were released within a year of each other, although the reason for comparing the two also seems related to the shared insect motif.

22 Toita Michizō, "*Suna no onna* wa nani o egaita ka: Gūwateki na toraekata," *Eiga geijutsu*, 70–1.

23 In the book Niki muses that although her naked body is pleasant to look at, because she's coated with sand, he doesn't particularly want to touch her. Abe Kōbō, *Suna no onna*, 45.

24 Okuno, 65.

25 Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, 87.

26 Shibuya Minoru, "Waga nikutai eiga ron," *Eiga geijutsu*, 34.

27 Ibid.

28 Okuno, 65.

29 Although the fimic version of *Woman in the Dunes* on the whole successfully circumvents the potential disgust that, as I have discussed in the chapter on Kawabata, reveals the danger of the sensate aestheticism's proximity to the lower senses through its reliance on female bodies, there are moments in which disgust threatens Niki/the spectator. The first moment is practically innocuous, but precisely since it has no other purpose, it stands out. This is when, after Niki unties the woman, she heads toward the door of the room. Niki asks her, "Where are you going?" She doesn't answer and steps beyond the camera range into the next room, we assume. One logical thought, that both Niki and the spectator might share, since he doesn't pursue this with any force, is that she is going to the toilet. In this vague suggestion there is a glimpse of the woman-as-(defiled) body. It makes more sense in the context of the rest of the film, in which, although it is Niki who makes the initial physical overture toward a sexual relation, it is the woman who appears to embody, exude even, desire. This potential for disgust also arises in the rape scene, as noted above, the discordant scene that most reviewers disliked. But it is in her "abnormal" pregnancy and the "examination" of her condition by the villagers that her animalism is most clear. Called by Niki's signal, the villager sniffs the woman. It is her odor, apparently, by which he understands that she is (unhealthily) pregnant. This is the second moment of "disgust" that hovers at the periphery of the sensual-disinterested-aesthetic.

Part III: Naming desire: Mishima Yukio and the politics of "sexuation" – Introduction

1 The chapters on Mishima incorporate revised and updated versions of two articles published in *Yuriika* in Japanese as, "Kōi suru yokubō – Mishima Yukio (1): Niku o tekusutoka suru, aruiwa, (hi)bunsetsu sareta yokubō" ("Performing desire: Mishima Yukio (1) Textualizing flesh, or, (in)articulate desire," *Yuriika*, 118–33, and "Kōi suru yokubō – Mishima Yukio (2): Narushishizumu to sadizumu – homofashizumu to shite no Mishima" ("Performing desire: Mishima Yukio (2): Narcissism and sadism: Mishima as homofascist") *Yuriika*, 225–45.
2 The first epigraph is from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, xxiii. The second was a comment that Asada Akira made to me following a symposium, "Nihon kindai bungaku to jendā" (Modern Japanese literature and gender) at Tokyo University in June 1999. I had just presented as keynote my then in-progress work on Kawabata, "Kawabata Yasunari ron: Homososhiaritii to daini no shizen no seiji" (On Kawabata Yasunari: The politics of homosociality and second nature). There was also a round-table discussion among Asada, myself, Matsuura Hisaki, and Jacques Levy. My presentation and a transcript of the round-table discussion are published in *Bungaku*, 2000.
3 For example, Mishima's *Hanazakari no mori* (*Forest in full flower*, 1944). See John Nathan, *Mishima*, 121 for a synopsis and excerpts in English.
4 It was still common for young, unknown writers to seek mentors among older, established, literary figures for their invaluable support in facilitating publication. Kawabata, of course, refused the term nihilism for himself, preferring to anchor his celebration of "emptiness" to Zen.
5 The narrator of *Confessions* claims that his perusal of a reproduction of a painting of Saint Sebastian resulted in his first ejaculation at age 12. For a critical discussion of the role of this painting and the positioning of the narrator against self and other, see Satō Hideaki, "San Sebasuchan no fuzai: *Kamen no kokuhaku* ron," in *Mishima Yukio: Bi to erosu no ronri*, Vol. 30.
6 Respectively, from *The New York Times* on the cover of *Thirst for Love*, from *The New Yorker* on the cover of *Acts of Worship*, and from the *Baltimore Sun* regarding *Runaway Horses*.
7 The major studies on Mishima available in English are Henry Scott Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*; Margerite Yourcenar, *Mishima*; Roy Starrs, *Deadly Dialectics*; Nathan's *Mishima*, and Jerry Piven, *The Madness and Perversion of Yukio Mishima*.
8 After the person committing suicide by disembowelment had completed cutting, ideally, a full circle in their own belly, the "second" performed the role of beheading him (and thus ending the extreme suffering). This was, also ideally, completed with a single sword stroke. At Mishima's actual suicide, not only did he not complete the full circle, his second made two unsuccessful attempts to behead him. Another member of the Shield Society finally took the sword and completed the beheading. See Nathan for more detailed discussion of the Shield Society and the attempted "coup."
9 See Nathan.
10 Mishima Yukio, "Bunka bōei ron," *Mishima Yukio hyōron zenshū*, Vol. 3. See also his response to the charge of fascism, Mishima Yukio, "Shinfashizumu ron," *Mishima Yukio zenshū*, Vol. 26.
11 Article 9 of the postwar Japanese constitution made any future military action unconstitutional. A compromise resulted in the establishment of a self-defense corps.
12 Shimada Masahiko, "Mishima ga yume de watakushi ni kataru koto," in *Katarazu, utae*, 50.

13 See Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter* and also *Gender Trouble*.
14 See Jennifer Robertson, *Takarazuka*, especially "Staging Androgyny," 47–88, for a discussion of how the staging of femininity by the women who portray "females" in the all-female theater troupe Takarazuka can effect a radical denaturalization of "femaleness."

8 Textualizing flesh, or, (in)articulate desire

1 I borrow the term "outlaw" here from Leo Bersani, *Homos*. Bersani uses the term in his discussion of Jean Genet, to which I will also make several references. By "outlaw" I mean a certain structure of defiance against and refusal to participate in society.
2 Nathan, 121.
3 I intentionally do not separate sadism from masochism here as separate economies of desire. See my discussion that follows in this section.
4 There was an attempted *coup d'état* on February 26, 1936, by a group of young Imperial Army officers. Calling for a "Showa Restoration" they sought to restore the emperor to his "proper" position as supreme commander of the imperial troops. Two of the officers committed ritual suicide (*seppuku*, or death by self-disembowelment) when the coup failed. See Nathan for a description and discussion of the event.
5 Nathan, 94–5.
6 Ibid., 121.
7 Ibid., 162, 164, 163.
8 Sugimoto Kazuhiro, "*Kamen no kokuhaku* oboegaki," in *Mishima Yukio: Bi to erosu no ronri*, Vol. 30. The writers of the *shishōsetsu* sought transparency in narrative text. See Suzuki and Fowler.
9 See Noguchi.
10 Fukuda Tsuneari, "*Kamen no kokuhaku* ni tsuite," in *Kamen no kokuhaku*, 238–44.
11 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 14. Final emphasis added.
12 Bersani, *Homos*, 160–1.
13 My discussion of Edo-period male–male practices is indebted throughout to Gregory Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire.*
14 Ibid., 39.
15 Ibid., 255–6.
16 For informative and enlightening discussions of these transformations see Vincent, "Writing Sexuality," Vincent, *et al*., *Gei sutadiizu*; Pflugfelder.
17 Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality*.
18 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 10.
19 See Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave," *AIDS*, on the abjection of anal sex linked to perceiving the penetrated male to be like a women. On the exploration of this feminized abjection in Japanese literary text see my chapters on Nakagami Kenji, "The Body: Deformities, Nasty Blood, and Sexual Violence," and "An Ambivalent Masculinist Politicts," both in *Dangerous Women*, 186–225.
20 Mishima, *The Way of the Samurai*, 164.
21 Ibid., 142. I have changed Sparling's "homosexual" to "male-male."
22 Pflugfelder, 39–40. Of course, many *onnagirai* were indeed engaged in male-male erotic relations; my point is that the term was then closer to "misogynist" than to "homosexual."
23 Mishima Yukio, "Bunshō tokuhon," in *Mishima Yukio zenshū*, Vol. 28. See also my discussion of this in "Language and Bodies; or, Never Write Words on Sitting Cushions," in *Dangerous Women*, 75–95.
24 Karatani Kōjin, "Fūkō to Nihon," in *Mishero Fūkō no seiki*; Vincent, "Writing Sexuality," and Vincent, *et al*., *Gei sutadiizu*.

25 Pflugfelder, 228.
26 *Dasai* is a slang expression for "bad fashion taste" that literally means "those coming from Saitama Prefecture," which enjoys a reputation quite similar to that of New Jersey.
27 Asada Akira and Shimada Masahiko, *Tenshi ga tōru*, 158–9.
28 I use queer here to reference Mishima's homosexuality complicated by his sadomasochism. Mishima took up weight training (body-building), boxing, and *kendō* (Japanese fencing) in his thirties.
29 Unlike Genet's love of rimming, Mishima's abject was most commonly no more than blood and death. An exception is *Confessions*'s protagonist's desire stirred by the night-soil collector, or the man who pumped excrement from cesspools.
30 The quotation is from Mishima Yukio, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 166. Hereafter pagination follows quotations parenthetically within text. Emphasis added.
31 Mishima Yukio, *Forbidden Colors*, 28. Hereafter pagination follows quotations parenthetically within text.
32 Literally, "*kotoba no henshitsu*." Mishima Yukio, *Taiyō to Tetsu*, 35. Hereafter pagination follows quotations parenthetically within text.
33 *Katakana* is the syllabary in the Japanese language that is used to represent foreign words of non-Chinese origin.
34 Mishima Yukio, *Sun and Steel*, 18. Hereafter pagination follows quotations parenthetically within text.
35 Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle.*
36 Deleuze and Guattari, 105.
37 Ibid., 145.
38 Lacan, *Four Fundamental*, 41.
39 See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, also *Between Men*. The closet of a heteronormative society in which the homosexual conceals his/her identity is the site of an "open" secret. When, and if, the homosexual comes out, s/he is commonly greeted by acknowledgements that, after all, the person to whom s/he is confessing already knew on some level or had an inkling, as to that homosexuality. The dynamic of the closet is constituted as much by what is *not* said as what is. The closet, moreover, is the site of *contradictory* definitions of what is public or private (obvious in the current military policy of "Don't ask, don't tell"). Moreover, "coming out" of the closet can never be achieved in a single act of confession. It is, as Vincent and others have described it, a continual process of "becoming." There is never a complete liberation of being "out" in a heterosexist society. One is assumed to be straight unless one proclaims that one is not. Thus, encounters, whether they are intimate or of the most banal sort (shopping), are informed by the *a priori* assumption of heterosexuality unless the gay person announces his/her gayness or is marked or marks him/herself to be read by others who recognize that marking, throwing into doubt the line between "us" and "them." For more on this epistemology in Japan see Vincent, "Writing Sexuality."
40 Vincent, "Writing Sexuality," 8.
41 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis*, 6.
42 Ibid., 8, 7, 6.
43 See Pflugfelder and Vincent.
44 Edelman, 9–10.
45 Iwai Kazumasu, "Mishima Yukio to higeki: dōitsusei kakusan to kiteisareta mirai," in *Mishima Yukio*, Vol. 42.
46 Nathan, 160. Nathan's final emphasis removed.
47 See Sigmund Freud, "The Economic Problem in Masochism," in *Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, 260–1. Freud postulated that there are three "shapes" to masochism, "as a condition under which sexual excitation may be roused; as an expression of

feminine nature; and as a norm of behavior. According to this one may distinguish an *erotogenic*, a *feminine*, and a *moral* type of masochism" (257. Original emphasis).
48 Ibid.
49 Theodor Reik, *Masochism in Modern Man*, 32.
50 Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism*.
51 Ibid., 30.
52 Ibid., 40–1.
53 Reik builds on Freud's "The Economic Problem in Masochism" to challenge the notion that the masochist seeks pain. Instead, he argues, the masochist seeks a build-up of pleasure in which pain is an effect, not a goal.
54 Deleuze, *Masochism*, 73.
55 In his 1919 "A Child is being Beaten: A Contribution to the Study of the Origin of Sexual Perversions," in *Collected Papers*, Vol. 2, Freud analyzes the common fantasy of a child being beaten as having three "phases." The first phase is the conscious one many people share, namely, a vague image of a child being beaten. In the psychoanalytic exploration of this vague image, a more detailed fantasy emerges which is, "a child is being beaten by my father." This manifest phase one has the latent (unconscious) significance of: my father loves only me. The second phase, that Freud argues is the most deeply unconscious and retrievable only through analytic work, is: my father is beating me. The latent significance of this fantasy is: I am being punished for my (sexual) desire for my father. That is, an unexplained *guilt* over incestuous desire stimulates the beating fantasy. The third phase, however, is the one that incites sexual excitement, even orgasm, and importantly, is different for men and women. For women, the fantasy becomes: a father-stand-in (teacher, etc.) is beating a group of boys, and I (the woman having the fantasy) experience (genital) sexual arousal. The woman thus substitutes boys for herself (in order to repress the desire for the father). For men, the fantasy becomes: my mother is beating me – thus replacing the father with the mother, but not the self as the one being beaten. For men, the fantasy is evidence of a latent homosexual desire for the father (172–201).
56 Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" and *Homos.*
57 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 14. Final emphasis added.
58 Deleuze and Guattari, 105.
59 Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*, 133, 124–5. Badiou writes, "the self-declared apostles of ethics and of the 'right to difference' are clearly *horrified by any vigorously sustained difference*. For them, African customs are barbarie, Muslims are dreadful, the Chinese are totalitarian, and so on. As a matter of fact, this celebrated 'other' is acceptable only if he is a *good* other which is to say what, exactly, if not the *same as us*. Respect for differences of course! But on condition that the different be parliamentary-democratic, pro-free-market economics, in favour of freedom, feminism, the environment . . . 'Become like me and I will respect your difference'" (*Ethics*, 24, 25. Original emphasis).
60 Tomioka Kōichirō, "Kamen no shingaku: 'Eirei no koe' iraku no Mishima Yukio," in *Mishima Yukio: Bi to erosu no ronri*, Vol. 30. Somewhat controversially, I should think, Tomioka likens this move of Mishima's to Nakagami Kenji's resurrection of myth.
61 Deleuze, *Masochism*, 17.
62 Mishima Yukio, *Confessions of a Mask*, 93. Further pagination appears parenthetically following quotes.

9 Narcissism and sadism: Mishima as homofascist

1 I presented two talks that dealt with material in this, and the following chapter: "Naming Desire: Mishima Yukio and the Politics of 'Sexuation,'" invited guest speaker, "Theorizing" Lecture Series, cosponsored by the Kelly Writers House

and the Program in Comparative Literature and Literary Theory (The University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, November, 2002); "Performing the Private: Desire in Mishima Yukio," invited guest speaker, Columbia University Symposium on Mishima Yukio (New York City, March 2001).

2 Toda Yoshio, "Yomigaeru Mishima Yukio," excerpted in *Mishima Yukio*, Vol. 23, 336.
3 Matsumoto Ken'ichi, "Renketsusha no senryaku," in *Mishima Yukio: Bi to erosu no ronri*, Vol. 30, 4.
4 Irie Takanori, "Jisai to tennōron no yukue," in *Mishima Yukio: Bi to erosu no ronri*, Vol. 30, 30.
5 Mishima Yukio, Open letter to Hashikawa Bunzō. As cited and quoted by Irie.
6 Ibid., 25.
7 Nathan, 245–9.
8 Matsumoto.
9 Bersani, *Homos*, 168, 169. Emphasis in last two sentences added.
10 See Vincent's enlightening discussion of Mishima's "Shin fashizumu ron" in "Writing Sexuality."
11 Hewitt, *Political Inversions*, 39.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 202.
14 Ibid., 57.
15 Irie, 30.
16 Vincent, "Writing Sexuality," 149–50. The commentary by Masao Miyoshi is from "Introduction," to Ōe Kenzaburō, *Two Novels*. This chapter is deeply indebted throughout to Vincent who first introduced me to Bersani and Edelman's work several years ago when I was writing my first book. The ongoing dialogue Vincent and I began in 1995 on issues raised by their work and that of other queer theorists has continued to shape my thinking on theorizing sexuality in the Japanese context, as has Vincent's dissertation and various publications.
17 Such as Hayashi Susumu, "Futatsu no narushishizumu," in *Mishima Yukio*, Vol. 42, which compares Mishima to Thomas Mann, and includes a sub-section on Mishima's homosexuality with recourse to Freud on narcissism and homosexuality; Jinzai Kiyoshi, "Narushishisumu no unmei," in *Mishima Yukio*, Vol. 23. The texts of Shimada's parodying Mishima include *Boku wa mozō ningen* and *Tengoku ga futte kuru*. See my "Amorphous Identity, Disavowed History: Shimada Masahiko and National Subjectivity," *positions*, 585–609.
18 Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in *Collected Papers*, Vol. 4, 51.
19 Copjec, *Read my Desire*, 37. Original emphasis. *Confessions* also details the tortured self-hatred of the protagonist, which can be analyzed precisely as the violence of narcissism, or the malevolence of the subject towards its representations at the failure to live up to its ideal. Clinical psychoanalytic theorists who have further theorized the importance of the aggression implicit in narcissism include Melanie Klein, Otto Kernberg, and Frantz Kohut. Thanks to Jerry Piven for directing me to some of these studies.
20 As quoted by Copjec, *Imagine*, 67.
21 Freud, "On Narcissism," 33.
22 Ibid., 45.
23 Copjec, *Imagine*, 61.
24 Ibid., 64.
25 Ibid., 66.
26 See Ibid., 58–9.
27 Ibid., 67.
28 Copjec, *Read my Desire*, 37.

29 Ibid., 37–8.
30 Freud, "On Narcissism," 45.
31 Edelman, 14.
32 Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 207, 212. Original emphasis. See especially her "Sex and the Euthanasia of Reason" for more.
33 *Ren'ai* is the Japanese translation of the English language word "love," connoting "romantic or Platonic love."
34 Satō Hideaki, 82. Freud even wrote in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess "I am accustoming myself to regarding every sexual act as an event between four individuals" (*The Ego and the Id*, 29 note 15).
35 Lacan, *Four Fundamental*, 268. Although Lacan is here talking of the relationship of the analysand to the analyst.
36 See Jacqueline Rose, "Introduction II," in *Feminine Sexuality*.
37 This cannot simply be an "originary" failure for by that formula Mishima would never have become an ego-functional subject. It represents, then, a retrogressive refusal, rather than a psychic "failure" proper.
38 I argue this against Bergeron, who held that the structure of the imaginary in Mishima was psychotic. Although her analysis is compelling, I think it misses the irony in Mishima's embrace of the emperor and neo-fascism, which suggests that the structure is more perverse than psychotic. Further, I think she misses the irony because, not having Japanese language skills, her reading is limited to the (French and English) translated canon. Her persuasive reading of the psychotic structure of Mishima's imaginary then suggests something about the choice of texts by translators that has produced yet another Mishima "mask."
39 Zupančič, 253.
40 Ibid., 255.
41 Or, as a more conventionally psychoanalytic analyst of Mishima, Bergeron has interpreted, his quest to follow the death drive to its aim has to do with the desire of his grandmother. See "Mishima: A Death Foretold." See also "Violence in Works of Art."

10 The homosocial fixing of desire

1 Matsumoto, 4.
2 Bersani, *Homos*, 7. See Copjec, *Imagine*, for a convincing critique of some aspects of Bersani's reading of Freud (and high praise for other aspects of his reading), 56–67.
3 Bersani, *Homos*, 6–7.
4 Ibid., 149–50.
5 I have used my own translation here.
6 Bersani, *Homos*, 165–6.
7 Ibid., 171–2, 177.
8 See my chapter "Space, geopolitics, and 'The idea of the desert,'" and Sakai, *Translation and Subjectivity*.

11 Scripting the scopic: disinterest in *Double Suicide*

1 A version of this chapter was published as "Gazing Disinterestedly: Politicized Poetics in *Double Suicide*," *Differences*. Talks that I gave at earlier stages of this research are: "Gazing Disinterestedly: Politicized Poetics in *Double Suicide*," Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, University of Oregon (Eugene, Oregon, February 1999); "Scripting the Scopic: Time, Space, and Text in Shinoda Masahiro's *Double Suicide*," Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting (Washington DC, March 1998).

2 See Desser; Satō Tadao, Vol. 3.
3 Hitomi Kakuhiko, 98.
4 The Genroku period is literally 1688–1703. Hitomi plays with this word, suggesting that Shinoda (and others no doubt) are bringing about a new, vital era of artistic innovation by calling the late 1960s "Showa Genroku."
5 Bock, 351.
6 Brecht, 98.
7 See Harootunian, "Epilogue: Native Knowledge and the Production of a Modern 'Japanese Ideology'" in *Things Seen and Unseen*, 407–39, for a discussion of this process. Harootunian writes that the Meiji-period nativist critique of modernity and attempt to formulate a notion of traditional Japan, "turned . . . toward constituting a culture from the dispersed fragments of the past, as an alternative to modern civilization . . ." (412). See also my section on Izumi Kyōka in *Dangerous Women*, 21–95.
8 Steve Odin, *Artistic Detachment in Japan and the West*, 19.
9 See my discussion of Zen Buddhism in Chapter 1, "Myth-making."
10 See Chapter 1, "Myth-making" and Chapter 4, "Virgins and other little objects," for a discussion of *iki*.
11 Sakai, *Voices of the Past*, 149. There are no macrons in Sakai's text.
12 See Sakai, *Voices of the Past*.
13 Karatani, "One Spirit," 621, 622.
14 Pincus, 204.
15 As translated and quoted by Pincus, 188. Original in Kuki, 22.
16 See Pincus; Karatani, "One Spirit."
17 Pincus, 187. See Cecilia Segawa Seigle, *Yoshiwara*, for a description of the prostitution quarters.
18 For more on the Meiji feminist movement, see Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt*.
19 See Brett de Bary, "Not Another Double Suicide," *Iris*, for an innovative and compelling interpretation of the contemporaneous sociopolitical relevance of the film. De Bary argues that Shinoda "attempt[ed] to restage Chikamatsu's domestic tragedy as a national allegory, on the occasion of centennial celebrations of the Meiji Restoration" (76).
20 See Desser; Satō Tadao, Vol. 3; Chapter 7 of this book, "Technologies of gazing."
21 On this premodern transcendence of the modern, see for example, Karatani, *Origins*; "Nihon seishin bunseki 1," *Hihyō kūkan*; *Architecture as Metaphor*; Masao Miyoshi, "Against the Native Grain: The Japanese Novel and the 'Postmodern' West," *South Atlantic Quarterly*.
22 Karatani, "One Spirit." Karatani argues that in his rejection of Buddhist, Confucian, and even Shintō doctrine, the *kokugaku* (nativist) scholar, Motoori Norinaga understood the subject-as-construct, or constructed by a discursive system, outside of which there is nothing. This recognition, moreover, predates the establishment of a "modern" subject. However, Karatani argues that subsequent *kokugaku* scholars quickly replaced this "subject-constructed-by-discourse" with a national and ethnic one, in effect "filling" it with myth. See also Naoki Sakai, *Voices of the Past*.
23 Karatani, "One Spirit," 627.
24 Ibid.
25 For a discussion in English on the Japanese distaste for structure (or the architectonic) see Karatani's "On the Power to Construct," in *Origins*, 136–72 and *Architecture*.
26 See, for example, David Bordwell, "Mizoguchi and the Evolution of Film Language," in *Cinema and Language*; Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, "Space and Narrative in the Films of Ozu," *Screen*; Noël Burch, *To the Distant Observer*.

27 Of course even more Japanese films employ conventional (i.e., Hollywood) filmic codes. The deployment of a decentered subject is thus clearly a choice made by these filmmakers, and not because of some inherent or cultural absence of modern perspectivalism.
28 Some essays in English that problematize this "Japanism" include Harry D. Harootunian, "Visible Discourses/Invisible Ideologies"; Tetsuo Najita, "On Culture and Technology in Postmodern Japan," both in *South Atlantic Quarterly*.
29 I use the term "ironic" here following William Earle, "Revolt Against Realism in the Films," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*.
30 See my discussion of Kawabata for more on the linking of modern arts to the premodern.
31 De Bary, 62.
32 Norman Bryson, "The Gaze in the Expanded Field," in *Vision and Visuality*, 106.
33 I use the phrase "epistemic constellation" (*kigōronteki na fuchi*) following Karatani (who appears to have modeled his terminology loosely on Foucault's deployment of "episteme") to designate a system composed of sets of relations that generate epistemologies (and constitute realms for the deployment of power and the institutions of knowledge) of a given time and place. See Brett de Bary's comments on her translation of the term in "Introduction," in Karatani, *Origins*, 6–7, and note 14, 197–8.
34 De Bary writes, "If, as Michel Foucault, Claude Lefort, and others have argued, ideology functions in modern systems to naturalize precisely the discursively constructed positions from which human beings appear to 'freely' speak and act, then it is possible to see Shinoda's compressed juxtaposition of theories of filmic signification with premodern linguistic practices as performing a critical decentering of modern conventions of representation. For Shinoda's writings on the premodern, although tinged with nostalgia, also represent a positing of the past as a source of difference that might unsettle the 'moralism' of the modern bourgeoisie" ("Not Another Double Suicide," *Iris*, 74–5).
35 Donald Keene, *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, 10.
36 Bock, 351.
37 Thanks to the anonymous referee from *Differences* for this insight.
38 Sakai, *Voices of the Past*, 156.
39 Bordwell, 112–13.
40 Ibid., 115.
41 It must be noted that in spite of the fact that such transition devices were in a sense superfluous to the narrative flow, they were deeply evocative. A shot of laundry drying amongst chimneys suggests the shift towards industrialization, for example. Such transition devices, moreover, may also foreground *environment*, evoking the Japanese philosopher Watsuji's stress on space in the construct of (Japanese) subjectivity. See my chapters on Abe for more on Watsuji. While undoubtedly few Japanese today are convinced by Watsuji's arguments as set forth in *Fūdo*, the generalized idea that Japanese sensibility is "naturally" bound to the *fūdo* (climate/topography, or geophysical environment) of Japan has become commonplace. For example, Irokawa disagrees with Watsuji, but still writes "it is not difficult to see how unusual Japan's environment has been, and how large a part it has played in the formulation of Japanese cultural sensitivity, modes of life, and social attitudes. It is of decisive importance that Japanese culture developed within the insulated environment of an island country. Watsuji Tetsurō's approach to this problem in his *Fūdo* does not suffice. What is required is a more comprehensive theory of environment" (4–5).
42 On suture, see Jacques-Alain Miller, "Suture (elements of the logic of the signifier)," *Screen*; Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture," *Screen*; Heath.
43 Lacan, *Seminar Book VII*, 283.

44 Keene, *Major Plays of Chikamatsu*, 418–19.
45 Lacan, *Seminar Book VII*, 280–1.
46 Copjec, *Imagine*, 42.
47 And this is also radically unlike Mishima's "brotherhood" of warriors going to a communal death.
48 As de Bary's footnote 37 on page 84 of "Not Another Double Suicide" attests, this comment is mistranslated in the English subtitles, which have Osan suggesting she might make Koharu a nursemaid or cook.
49 As quoted and translated by de Bary, 69.
50 This suggests to me that Copjec is indeed on to something when she argues: "If it is woman who is privileged in Lacan's analysis [of ethics] this is because she remains closer to the truth of being, while man obfuscates this truth through a nostalgic, secondary operation that allows him to maintain a belief in the plenitude of being to come. This is not to say that every woman acts ethically or that no man can . . . Only that the ethical act is in itself feminine in Lacan's terms" (*Imagine*, 7).

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